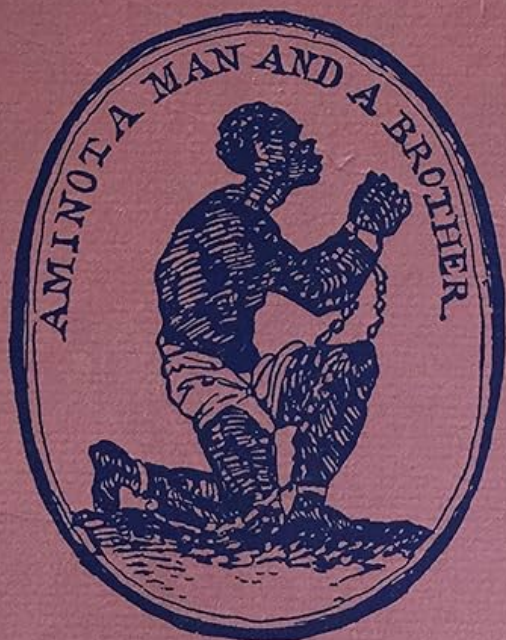


Liverpool, the African Slave Trade, and Abolition

edited by
Roger Anstey and P. E. H. Hair



Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire
Occasional Series

P. P. Burdett, *A Survey of the County Palatine of Chester* (1777),
facsimile edition, ed. J. B. Harley and P. Laxton (1974).

Liverpool, the African Slave Trade, and Abolition, ed. Roger
Anstey and P. E. H. Hair (1976).

Liverpool, the African Slave Trade, and Abolition

Essays to illustrate current knowledge and research

Edited by

Roger Anstey

Professor of Modern History, University of Kent

and

P. E. H. Hair

Reader in Modern History, University of Liverpool

Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire
Occasional Series Volume 2
1976

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ISSN 0305-9375

*Printed in Great Britain by
Western Printing Services Ltd, Bristol*

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Editorial Note

The society published its first Occasional volume, Burdett's *Survey of the county palatine of Chester*, in 1974. This year its second venture in this series is devoted to *Liverpool, the African slave trade, and abolition*, a volume of essays presented to members of the society as their annual volume, and offered for sale to non-members. On behalf of the council of the society we should like to express especial thanks to Professor Roger Anstey and Dr P. E. H. Hair, and to the other contributors for all their work. We are greatly indebted to the Philip Henry Holt Trust for a generous grant which has helped publication. And, once again, we thank Mr R. Bromley for providing an index.

With the appearance of last year's *Transactions* Dr P. J. Buckland laid down his editorial burdens. The present editors would like to express their appreciation and thanks to him for his co-operation and help over the last five years.

M. J. Power

J. I. Kermode

University of Liverpool, March 1976

Membership of the Historic Society is open to all and provides the right to attend the society's meetings, to borrow from its library and to receive an annual volume, either the *Transactions* or an Occasional volume. Membership enquiries will be welcomed by the Honorary Secretary, Mr P. J. Andrews, 15 Woodley Fold, Penketh, Warrington WA5 2JB.

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I

Introduction

ROGER ANSTEY and P. E. H. HAIR

There has recently been an upsurge of interest in the history of the Atlantic slave trade, its rise, mode of operation, and abolition. The present volume both derives from and testifies to the present interest.

The Atlantic slave trade was one of the dozen or so great streams of long-distance and even intercontinental migration which have swept the world in modern times, though it was almost certainly not the largest, most swiftly flowing or most immediately consequential.¹ The involuntary nature of the Atlantic migration of Black Africans distinguishes this movement from other great modern migrations, but only partly. For it may be asserted that no *Völkerwanderung* is wholly voluntary, and that this slave migration differed only in degree of involuntariness from modern large-scale migrations of 'free' persons.² In longer perspective, the Atlantic slave trade was only one of numberless migrations in history which have been (from the point of view of the individuals transferred, though not necessarily from the point of view of their societies) wholly involuntary. But what distinguishes the Atlantic slave trade from other great migrations in which the involuntary element was predominant, for instance, from its contextual neighbours, the Saharan, the Nile, and the East African slave trades, and what finally gives the Atlantic slave trade its peculiar interest for modern scholars, is that it occurred in historical circumstances which led to its being recorded, in fair detail, both in its operation and its abolition, in documentation extant and available today. Thus, the Atlantic slave trade is studied in our day and age, though from many different angles of interest, basically as the longest and largest

migration in human history which was both wholly involuntary and sufficiently recorded.

History being what the historians can make of the records, the historiography of the Atlantic slave trade is necessarily related to the uncovering of records. Recent and important advances in understanding have sprung largely from the realisation that more records were available than earlier generations of historians knew, or cared to use, or were capable of handling. Hence the latest international symposium on the Atlantic slave trade begins with a chapter whose earliest sections are entitled 'Une histoire qui reste à écrire' and 'Une histoire qu'il est possible d'écrire' ('A history yet to be written' and 'A history which can be written').³ The present volume attempts to show that a sound understanding of the Atlantic slave trade, as of any phenomenon in the past, depends on a sufficiency of records and their systematic and objective exploitation.

Since historians are themselves enmeshed in the historical process, the new upsurge of interest in the Atlantic slave trade has of course also derived from changing global power-dispositions. Much as in earlier centuries, it has seemed good to some writers and historians to present the history of the Atlantic slave trade as an *exemplum* for value-judgements intended to supply emotive drive to contemporary popular expressions of power shift. The present volume tends to ignore this second source of interest, and its vocabulary. It does so advisedly, in the conviction that the 'clinical' approach to the human past is of more lasting value than the 'passionate'.⁴

The purpose of the present volume is to draw attention to recent study of the Atlantic slave trade in its most active full century, the eighteenth century, the period in which Britain and above all the port of Liverpool began to play an increasingly major role in the trade, and to recent study of the ending of Liverpool's slave trade by the British abolition of 1806-7. A definitive picture of any aspect of these subjects is only just beginning to emerge. Indeed, the most striking advances in understanding which have been wrung from a more systematic study of the records, for instance, by the application of strict quantitative analysis, have to some extent merely served to point out the inadequacy of earlier understanding. More so perhaps than in most other fields of history, the general reader who is

anxious to gain an objective assessment of what is and can be known about the Atlantic slave trade, in relation to Black Africa on the one hand and to Liverpool and Britain on the other, is most strongly recommended to treat earlier writings as little more than documentation of contemporary opinions and partial information. And instead he is urged to concentrate on a handful of works written within the last decade, especially David B. Davis' *The problem of slavery in western culture* (1966), Philip D. Curtin's *The Atlantic slave trade: a census* (1969),⁵ A. G. Hopkins' *Economic history of West Africa* (1973), Roger Anstey's *The Atlantic slave trade and British abolition* (1975) and the recent symposium (partly in English) on *La traite des noirs par l'Atlantique* (1975).⁶ These works, while they build on earlier research and provide useful guides to it, also indicate, explicitly or implicitly, areas in which research is not only needed (too often a pious ploy of the historian) but can actually be performed on records known to exist. Some of this research is under way, and the essays in the present volume provide a sample of current research, at various levels of inquiry. If the essays are modest in general conclusions, as befits interim reports, nevertheless they show very clearly the directions in which research is proceeding, and they make it clear that many of the general conclusions accepted in the past are no longer tenable. They do not add up to a history of the Liverpool slave trade and British abolition,⁷ yet taken together with the works cited above, whose information they attempt not to repeat, they provide a moderately comprehensive guide to the present state of knowledge.

* * *

When John Newton noted in his sea journal for 10 February 1750 that 'the punt and canoe made each two trips from Liverpool . . . Will Grey of Liverpool sent me off a woman slave with a young child, but I refused her, being very long breasted', the locality he was referring to was not on the River Mersey but on the River St Paul in that section of the Guinea coast which is now Liberia. 'Black Liverpool', as this beach village was often known to English slave captains, was not the only Liverpool in West Africa, for there was another to the north, on Rio Pongas (in modern Guinée). Both were slaving centres. Captain Newton, later the Evangelical clergyman, co-writer of the Olney Hymns,

and abolitionist, had in fact sailed from white Liverpool; and there, a few years later, as he wrote in a letter of 1754, he 'had the pleasure of returning thanks in all the churches, for an African voyage performed without any disaster or the loss of a single man'. A generation later, an African trader at Calabar (in what is now Nigeria) kept a diary in pidgin English; and the entry for 7 March 1785 reads—'About 6 a.m. in Aqua landing with fine morning so I go down for landing. After 10 o'clock wee go chop for Egbo Young house Liverpool Hall and after 12 clock we see new ships mate come. And come to tell us his [ship] will not come heer, did go Camrown. So Duke say, berry well, may go way plase.' That is, the African diarist and his black colleagues met for a meal, and to receive a message from a passing slave ship, at the abode of one of them which bore the name 'Liverpool Hall'. On 25 December of the same year the Calabar traders gave a Christmas dinner (the diarist calls it a New Year dinner) to Captains Fairweather and Potter, the former certainly from Liverpool, the latter probably so.⁸

These extracts serve to illustrate the close and involved contact between Liverpool and the western coasts of Black Africa during the later and most flourishing period of the Atlantic slave trade. While this contact is an oft-mentioned item in Africanist scholarship, and in the cultural and political mythology of developing Black Africa, it has in the present century been made somewhat light of in Liverpool. The 125 volumes of local history *Transactions* contain only a handful of papers referring to the slave trade; and the best history of Liverpool, written in 1957 by the then Public Librarian and commended by the Lord Mayor, though it contains four chapters on the inconsequential pre-1700 history, can muster only two paragraphs on African trade, the second concluding thus: 'In the long run, the triangular operation based on Liverpool was to bring benefits, not least to the transplanted slaves, whose descendants have subsequently achieved in the New World standards of education and civilisation far ahead of their compatriots whom they left behind.' Without adopting such a Panglossian stance, it is possible to believe that those who blame white Europe for Black Africa's backwardness ('How Europe underdeveloped Africa' is the title of one work), and specify Liverpool's responsibility during the period of the slave trade, over-simplify and exag-

gerate. In relation to this debate on Third World history, the present volume contains material which contributes to the perennial discussion of the size of slave trade profits and their contribution to British industrialisation.¹⁰

As one contributor suggests, it is likely that Liverpool was more important for the slave trade than the slave trade was for Liverpool. There were certainly reasons other than shame or callousness why modern Liverpool has forgotten the slave trade. Only a limited proportion of Liverpool commerce engaged in the African trade even at its peak, and some contemporaries must have regarded it as mainly a service necessary for the development of the generally more important American connection. Further, a large part of the present-day population of Merseyside derives not from the eighteenth-century population but from the massive immigration after 1807, especially from Ireland; and naturally the griefs of Africa come a poor third locally to the griefs of urban adjustment and the griefs of Ireland. Finally, the physical expansion and redevelopment of the town and port in the nineteenth century means that there is little monumental reminder of the slave trade period. Exceptionally the Bluecoat School still stands: it was built by Bryan Blewell and other merchants with slave trading interests, and the historian of the port unkindly concludes—'they were so often mean that we should remember the occasion when they were generous'.¹¹

Nevertheless it is possible to trace connections between the Atlantic slave trade and modern Liverpool. Legislation of the 1790s required British slave ships to carry a surgeon, and the training of such surgeons was undertaken in Liverpool: it has been argued that this established a tradition of medical teaching, and possibly of interest in tropical medicine, which led eventually to the establishment of the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine (and therefore in turn to Sir Ronald Ross' experiments in mosquito control in West Africa, conducted on behalf of the School).¹² It does not seem to be the case that any part of the small community of persons of African extraction established in Liverpool today is descended from ancestors who arrived on Merseyside before 1807; and it is not even clear that a tradition of black settlement goes back to the eighteenth century. However, in the 1780s there were living in Liverpool as temporary

residents some 80 or so black children, sons and daughters of African merchants and slavers, who had been sent by their parents to Britain for primary education.¹³ Though a continuous tradition of African education on Merseyside cannot be claimed, since only in the present century did African students begin to come to Liverpool's higher colleges and university, a tradition of the use of local facilities by visiting West African intellectuals has been maintained. In the nineteenth century this mainly took the form of the early generations of 'modernised' West Africans entrusting their books and pamphlets to Liverpool firms to print and publish. At the turn of the century, E. W. Blyden, 'the Father of West African nationalism', whose patron and friend was Sir Alfred Jones, the Liverpool shipowner, not only published in the town but on his regular visits was to be found addressing local societies and attending as guest of honour the launching of ships for the Africa trade.

Jones, Blyden, and their mutual acquaintance Mary Kingsley, shared views about the cultural evolution of Black Africa which led to their criticising current British government policy. But more radical was the anti-imperialism of the Merseyside writer, Gomer Williams, whose pages on the Liverpool slave trade in his 1897 volume were intended as a contribution to that movement of protest against imperial advance in Africa which was to produce Lloyd George's pro-Boer stance and J. A. Hobson's *Imperialism* (1903). With the aid of misleading statistics Williams argued that Britain had exploited Africa in the past, by making immense profits out of the slave trade.¹⁴ But perhaps Williams' most lasting contribution to the history of the trade was his inclusion in his book of a handful of letters (the originals since lost) written to Liverpool in the 1790s by the African traders of the same Calabar which sited 'Liverpool Hall'. And this brings us back to the essential past link between Liverpool and Black Africa, the commercial one. Based in some part on the experience and goodwill of contacts in the eighteenth century, and on the capital generated, Liverpool's produce trade with West Africa grew rapidly in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, creating such business enterprises as Elder Dempster, John Holt, and Lever Brothers. West African produce assisted the industrial growth of Merseyside, and has left its monument on the map in Port Sunlight. The connection with Blyden and

Gomer Williams carries the tenuous cultural link between Liverpool and Black Africa forward into the anti-colonial 1970s: whether the more substantial commercial link will survive Third World cultural revolution remains to be seen.

* * *

Study of the Liverpool slave trade has been revolutionised in the last few years by four separate historiographical developments: first, the systematic academic study of African history, leading to a careful and evidenced assessment of long-term economic and social change in West Africa during the period of the Atlantic slave trade; secondly, the detailed examination by economic historians of the business organisation of the British slave trade, in the context of what is known about other British trades and industries in the same period; thirdly, renewed and wider inquiry into changes in social and moral values in Europe and Britain in the period 1700–1850, involving perspectives which induce questioning of the simplistic assumptions of the past regarding moral motivation and economic self-interest; and finally, through the growth of local history, a more cautious and detailed investigation of the economic, social and political structures of eighteenth-century Liverpool. All four developments are represented in the essays that follow.

Liverpool became a leading port for the organisation and operation of the Atlantic slave trade in the 1740s; and during the next six decades, up to 1807, large numbers of Liverpool vessels, normally between 40 and 110, visited Africa annually. The first two essays describe some of the historical circumstances within which the Liverpool enterprise developed. *Marion Johnson* discusses the economic organisation of slave trading on the West African coast, particularly in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, when most of the trading was done on the west and central sections of that coast. Further, she discusses the relationship between the slave trade and the general African economy, a relationship which, in keeping with widely accepted current views, she sees as one whereby the slave trade was closely integrated with long-term and rational trends in the relevant African societies. *W. E. Minchinton* looks at the period immediately before Liverpool's supremacy in the British trade. Describing Bristol's trade with the more southern of the Thirteen

Colonies, he considers many aspects of the economic organisation—for instance, seasonality, voyage duration, and slaves/ship ratios—which are again discussed in later essays in relation to the subsequent Liverpool trade. *David Richardson* considers the Liverpool trade of the third quarter of the eighteenth century, as exemplified in the activities of, and recorded in the accounts of, William Davenport; and his analysis of the accounts, probably the most detailed evidence on any large sample of the Liverpool trade, is directed towards conclusions about shifting levels of profits. He thus contributes to the resolution of a problem which recent research, not only on the British but on the French and Dutch trades, has brought to the fore: since average slave trade profits in the eighteenth century were not high by the standards of the age, that is, in relation to the returns that could be obtained in many other forms of capital investment, why—and how—did astute business men continue to conduct the trade?¹⁵

Three essays, all drawing in part on a single archive source recently discovered, describe aspects of the Liverpool trade at its height. *D. P. Lamb* provides a detailed statistical analysis of the volume of the Liverpool trade, and of the size of the ships employed; and in an appendix assesses the implications of changes in methods of tonnage calculation. *Herbert S. Klein and Stanley L. Engerman* consider the mortality of slaves aboard British ships during the 1790s, and see mortality differentials as arising as much from changes in the size of ships, and shifts in the preferred African regions for slaving, as from the effect of legislation; so that they question whether the traditional explanation of differential mortality, degree of 'overcrowding', is adequate or even helpful.¹⁶ *B. K. Drake*, dealing with the last period of the Liverpool slave trade, examines those commercial and entrepreneurial problems of a typical slave voyage which arose in Liverpool or on the African coast. He especially examines the regional preferences of Liverpool traders, and the shift first eastwards to the Niger Delta and then on southwards to Angola. Liverpool vessels also traded in produce, and some attention is devoted to this trade whose continuance and growth after abolition has carried the period of intense commercial relations between Liverpool and Black Africa, beginning in the 1740s, forward to the present time. Topics principally dealt with in the

above six essays on the slave trade are listed, for the convenience of the reader, on pp. 10-11.

The remaining essays in the volume deal with the British abolition of the slave trade in 1806-7. *Roger Anstey* examines the historiography of abolition and considers the significance of some recent works. *Seymour Drescher's* paper considers and rejects the proposition that abolition represented essentially a response to the imperatives of emergent British industrial capitalism: he denies that 'the end of the slave trade is a tale of triumphant economic supersession'. Instead he contends that abolition meant a triumph of new moral values over immediate economic self-interest, and that this occurred because ideas concerning the non-property status of human beings were extended from application solely in the homeland and to British persons, to application in distant lands and to persons of exotic cultures. In the final essay, *Frank Sanderson* assesses the activities of those men in Liverpool who supported abolition; and he concludes that their place in history lies somewhere between the blank space implied by the common view that Liverpool solidly supported the slave trade, and the pedestal proposed by historians who have believed that the Liverpool abolitionists were national leaders and local martyrs.

Essayists were encouraged to provide generous bibliographical references and supply information about the less well known archive material. Contemporary official printed material is listed in Mr Lamb's second appendix, which also describes the unprinted lists in the House of Lords Record Office. Mrs Johnson comments on archive material in the Public Record Office (London) and in Holland. Mr Richardson describes the Davies-Davenport papers at the University of Keele Library, and he, as well as Mr Drake and Mr Sanderson, employs material from Liverpool archives. Mr Drake makes extensive use of the Liverpool press. This information about sources supplements that in two recent bibliographies. Peter C. Hogg's *The African slave trade and its suppression* (1973) is geographically very wide-ranging and meticulous in the detail it supplies, but it lacks a close historical introduction and is sometimes deficient in the very detail which the working historian requires. F. E. Sanderson's article, 'Liverpool and the slave trade: a guide to sources' (*THSLC* 124, 1973, pp. 154-76), provides a sound, thorough

and helpful guide to the more limited topic, not only in relation to printed sources but also to archive material. Unpublished material not cited in these bibliographies includes several valuable theses and dissertations, Mr Richardson's on the Bristol slave trade (Manchester, 1969), and those mentioned in Mr Lamb's and Mr Drake's essays, including their own, which have been produced at Exeter, under Professor W. E. Minchinton, and at Liverpool. Finally an article by Mr Maurice Schofield, a former President of the Historic Society, on the slave enterprises of North-West ports other than Liverpool, which represents many years of research on Mediterranean Passes and other mid-eighteenth-century material in the Public Record Office, was prepared for this volume, but regrettably had to be excluded for reasons of space, and will appear instead in a subsequent issue of the *Transactions*.¹⁷

Acknowledgements

The present volume derives from a small seminar on 'Liverpool, the slave trade, and abolition', held in the School of History, University of Liverpool, in May 1974. The seminar was organised by Frank Sanderson and attended by most of the scholars who have contributed essays to the present volume. We wish to thank Mr Sanderson for his initiative; and the officers of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire for inviting us to transform the informal discussions at the seminar into a volume of essays for the Society's Occasional series. On behalf of the contributors we would like to express indebtedness for assistance rendered by library and archive staff in various libraries, but particularly in Liverpool public libraries and University library. On behalf of the Society as well as ourselves, we thank the contributors for their cooperation, tolerance and punctuality. Finally, we wish to thank the Society's editors, who have given us regular advice and guidance over a period of many months. Without their willingness to undertake additional labours the appearance of this volume would have been impossible.

Principal topics covered in slave trade essays (chapters 2-7)

(Essays are cited by the first letter of the author's name). Liverpool became the major British port in the trade, succeeding London and Bristol (M,L): the volume of the trade during parts of the eighteenth century (M,L) was affected by wars (R,L). Like Bristol merchants before them (M), Liverpool merchants financed and organised slave voyages (R,D): financing was done partly by direct investment, partly by arranging credit (R,D). Insurance (R) and management (R) had also to be arranged; and trade goods acceptable to Africans procured (J,R,D). Though ships were

of varying size, the average increased over time (M,L); and some vessels performed several voyages (R,M). To some extent there was a season for departure from Liverpool (M,D), a season for being on the African coast (D), and a season for arriving at North American ports (M). Average durations of the whole triangular voyage (M,KE,D), of the voyage to Africa and the voyage on to America (KE), also of stay in Africa (KE,D) and in America (M), have been calculated for samples of vessels at different periods. On the African coast, Liverpool slave merchants had strong regional preferences which resulted in geographical shifts (R,L,KE,D). They traded with African merchants, using various forms of exchange and methods of trading (J), including some granting of credit (J,D); and pricing mechanisms were complex (D). They traded for produce as well as slaves (D); and they paid dues demanded by African polities (J,D). Turn-around times influenced regional preferences and were perhaps determined by African circumstances (D). Factors in slave mortality aboard ship included regional provenance and the male/female and adult/child ratios (M,KE). The slaves were sold in various ports of the West Indies (KE) or North American mainland (M), where some of the crew of slave ships deserted (M) and where return cargoes were procured (M,D). But proceeds returned to Britain mainly in the form of bills of exchange (M,R); thus providing one of the many complications involved in calculating profits (R). Finally, the legislation of the 1790s regulating slaves/ship ratios, though apparently complied with (L), may have had little real effect because it codified existing practice (KE).

NOTES

- 1 Limiting ourselves to recent centuries, the migration northward of Chinese to Manchuria and Japanese to Hokkaido, the migration eastward of Russians to central Asia and Siberia, the migration westward of west and central Europeans to both Americas, have each most probably more than matched (in volume or intensity, or both) the scale of the Atlantic migration of Black Africans. And the 'Black Diaspora', though by virtue of its earlier start now surpassing in numbers the similar modern dispersals from India and China, is of course much smaller than the 'White Diaspora' from Europe.
- 2 Consider, for instance, in the recent past the migrations of Jews from Russia and Germany, the migrations of Irish, Sicilians, Armenians, Uganda Asians and West Indians. In more distant times, how voluntary was the migration of Angles and Saxons to England, the migration of Arabians to Egypt and North Africa, and the migration of Bantu-speaking Black Africans to southern Black Africa?
- 3 Pieter Emmer, Jean Mettas and Jean-Claude Nardin (eds.), *La traite des noirs par l'Atlantique: nouvelles approches*, special number of *Revue française d'histoire d'outre-mer* 62 (1975), pp. 1-390. This volume, which includes papers given at the Sixth international economic history conference, held at Copenhagen in 1974, unfortunately did not appear in time to be seen by our contributors. Since the majority of the papers are in English, and represent important statements on the present state of research in the wider field, we introduce frequent references to the volume in this introduction.

- 4 Not least because the former approach, being less easily tempted to judge the past by contemporary and therefore fickle criteria of historical relevance and moral appropriateness, is less inhibiting to the historian's most worthy passion, that for truth. The terms 'clinical' and 'passionate' are borrowed from the introduction by W. E. Minchinton and P. C. Emmer to *La traite des noirs*, *op. cit.*, which contrasts Eric Williams' *Capitalism and slavery* (1944), and P. D. Curtin's *The Atlantic slave trade: a census* (1969), 'the one passionate, the other clinical'. Note however that 'clinical' is itself a slightly loaded term, since it implies the existence of a malfunction, disorder, or abnormal condition – unless it be accepted that abnormality is *la condition humaine*.
- 5 Curtin's work has proved extremely stimulating to historians, as witness the many references to it in *La traite des noirs*, *op. cit.* Essentially a critique of earlier estimates of the volume of the trade, the revised estimates it suggests have been most useful in persuading other scholars to search for and analyse unpublished material, to check Curtin's estimates against. While these have sometimes stood up surprisingly well (cf. *La traite des noirs*, p. 32), the newer calculations are more soundly based. In an essay intended for the present volume but excluded because of lack of space, one of the editors (P.E.H.H.) has repeated a criticism of Curtin's volume first made in a review (*Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* 68, 1971, pp. 94–5). Despite many warnings on earlier pages that his subsidiary estimates are tentative and probably not exact, Curtin's final table (Table 77) produces a grand total for the whole Atlantic slave trade (of imports to the Americas), by adding up the subsidiary estimates and giving a figure of 9,566,100 – this without even the typographical device of a single (?) to warn the incautious reader. Moreover, on the page opposite Curtin speaks of his study as 'reducing the estimated total export of slaves from about twenty million to about ten million'. But if appropriate margins of error are given to all the subsidiary estimates which involve assumptions of problematical validity, no such grand total can be produced. Hair concludes: 'Curtin's survey, taken together with the modifications suggested by other scholars since 1969, has proved the following. The number of slaves exported from Africa during the whole period of the Atlantic slave trade was almost certainly less than 20M and more than 8M; most probably less than 16M and more than 10M; and *perhaps* (a tiny and possibly subjective balance of probability in its favour) between 14M and 11M. Hence any view of the operation or effects of the Atlantic slave trade which turns upon the grand total of exports being – within the range 10M to 16M – one figure rather than another, say 10M rather than 15M, needs to be received with great caution.'
- 6 See note 3.
- 7 Note that the title of the present volume, with its use of the unsatisfactory term 'the African slave trade', was chosen partly to indicate that attention was being concentrated on Liverpool and Africa, at the expense of the American end of the trade.
- 8 B. Martin and M. Spurrell (eds.), *Journal of a slave trader (John Newton) 1750–1754* (1962), pp. 35, 95; D. Forde (ed.), *Efik traders of Old Calabar* (1956), pp. 81, 92.
- 9 George Chandler, *Liverpool: sponsored by Liverpool City Council to celebrate the 750th anniversary of Liverpool's first charter* (1957), p. 306.
- 10 But 'it might be more useful to see [the relationship between the slave

- trade and economic development] as one in which the conditions generating sustained economic growth permitted the expansion of a profitable slave trade rather than vice-versa', *La traite des noirs*, *op. cit.*, p. 336 (summary of Engerman's 'Comments').
- 11 C. N. Parkinson, *The rise of the port of Liverpool* (Liverpool, 1952), p. 101: for the surviving monuments of Liverpool, see the splendid photographs and perceptive text in Quentin Hughes, *Seaport* (1964).
 - 12 E. Noble Chamberlain, 'The influence of the slave trade on Liverpool medicine', *Atti. Fourteenth international congress on the history of medicine* (Rome, 1954); F. E. Sanderson, 'The Liverpool delegates and Sir William Dolben's bill', *THSLC* 124 (1973), pp. 57-84, on p. 83, n. 65.
 - 13 *Report of the Lords of the Committee of the Privy Council relating to Trade and Plantations... on the Slave Trade* (1789) ref. J. Matthews.
 - 14 Gomer Williams, *History of the Liverpool privateers, with an account of the Liverpool slave trade* (Liverpool, 1897), the slave trade section on pp. 463-690. Chapter 6 was significantly entitled 'Emoluments of the traffic - a millionaire's venture'.
 - 15 On profitability in various national slave trades, see the remarks by Minchinton and Emmer in *La traite des noirs*, *op. cit.*, pp. 14-16; and on the larger question of the effect of the slave trade on European national economies, see Engerman's 'Comments', pp. 331-6.
 - 16 Cf. 'Changes in mortality at sea seemed more the product of conditions at the African port towns and along their associated trade routes than the result of weather conditions at sea. . .', J. C. Miller, 'Legal Portuguese slaving from Angola 1760-1830', *ibid.*, p. 156. A factor in producing differential mortality which is perhaps insufficiently taken into account in current studies is that of the differential reliability of the data. Still, it may well be significant that whereas slave mortality on Liverpool slave ships in the later eighteenth century appears to have been markedly under 10 per cent, that on Dutch ships throughout the century was around 20 per cent, J. Postma, 'The Dutch slave trade: a quantitative assessment', *ibid.*, pp. 232-44, on p. 238.
 - 17 Owing to the illness of one of us at a critical moment, the final form and wording of the introduction have been the work of the second editor, who wishes to exonerate his colleague from responsibility for errors and infelicities therein.

The Atlantic slave trade and the economy of West Africa

MARION JOHNSON

Much attention has been paid recently to the Atlantic slave trade as a form of European and American business enterprise, and particularly to the way in which it was conducted from Liverpool, Bristol, Nantes and other ports. By contrast, recent work on the African end of the trade has tended to look at the numbers involved, the areas from which they came, and the possible effects of the trade on African societies rather than at the economic organisation in Africa and the way the trade related to the general economy of West Africa.¹ Since the Atlantic slave trade patently involved large numbers of Africans (far more than the ten million or so who were procured as slaves and removed to America) it is perhaps surprising that more attention has not been paid to the African end of the trade.² What goods went in to Africa in return for the men and women taken out? From whom did the European merchants buy the slaves? Where did the slaves come from, and how did they reach the coast? How did they come to be slaves in the first place, and why did it pay anyone to go to the expense of transporting them across the Atlantic rather than employing them at home? And what long-term benefits, if any, did Africa reap in compensation for the very obvious losses inflicted by the trade?

The Africans who took part in the Atlantic slave trade have left virtually no records,³ apart, that is, from the slightly dubious reminiscences of a handful of the slaves. The European trading companies, on the other hand, left voluminous trading records from which a great deal can be deduced; and the papers of a

fair number of slaving voyages have fortunately survived, some from parts of the coast not visited by company ships. Resident merchants on the coast and ships' captains gave evidence to various commissions of enquiry, and took part in the controversies over the slave trade during its last half century: some but not all of this material was printed contemporaneously. Much of the unpublished English material is to be found in the Public Record Office; a number of useful documents from this source are printed in Donnan's *Documents illustrative of the Slave Trade to America*.⁴ French, Dutch, Danish and Portuguese companies and ships also left records about the West African trade, to be found in the various national archives. This paper is based in part on the first findings of research into some of these extensive records. It concentrates on the experience of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and on the West African or Guinea region. The experience of the Congo/Angola region, where there is more evidence of European intervention inland and the obtaining of slaves in 'just wars', with correspondingly more destructive effects on states and societies, may have been rather different.⁵

THE TRADE GOODS

European merchants stole, literally, very few of the slaves they exported. At the very beginning of the trade, in the fifteenth century, seizure was fairly common, and cases were reported even in the eighteenth century. But it was always a short-sighted policy, and so frequently brought swift retribution upon its perpetrators that only ignorant greenhorns tried it. Hence, almost all the slaves exported were purchased, either by trading ships or by resident traders ashore. In some areas, slaves were bought for what was locally used as currency—manillas in the eastern Niger Delta, cowries on the Slave Coast, *guinée* cloth on the River Senegal. Even in these areas, other goods were usually handed over in addition to the local money; elsewhere, slaves were paid for entirely in goods. The main categories of goods in demand were as follows: cloth and beads, iron bars, brass rods and brass bowls, alcohol and tobacco, guns and gunpowder. Each of the European trading countries had its favourite goods, which it could supply cheaply—Dutch linen and brassware, English

woollens, French brandy—while the Brazilians brought tobacco, the only item they were officially supposed to use in the trade.

Cloth

The item imported into Africa most regularly and in the largest quantities was cloth in various forms—small quantities of silks from China, an occasional Japanese dressing gown, and a wider range of Indian silks and cotton and silk mixtures; woollen goods from England and Flanders, including the ‘perpetuanas’ woven in Devon, often dyed in specially bright colours for the African trade; coarse linens from Europe, particularly from Silesia, and incredible quantities of second-hand linen sheets from Holland; finally, cottons from India in considerable variety, mainly of the coarser types, known by English, French, Dutch or Danish approximations to their local names.⁶ Despite their unsuitability for the climate, and despite the evident difficulties experienced in storing them, woollens continued in demand throughout the period of the slave trade. One trader noted that, as might be expected, woollens were more popular during the cooler season.⁷ The types of cottons sold by each European nation corresponded originally with the parts of India and the East Indies each controlled and traded with. But from an early date, European-made imitations entered the market, and in the eighteenth century the new mechanised techniques were applied to the manufacture of these imitations. Not all imitations were successful; French imitation *guinées* were rejected because they did not have the smell which guaranteed the authenticity of the Indian original, and many of the Manchester prints and dyed cloths were rejected as inferior to the Indian products whose names they bore.⁸ A whole category of cotton prints were ‘prohibited imports’ in England, but could be imported in bond for re-export to West Africa.⁹ Fashions in cloth varied from place to place and from time to time, so that it was all too easy to arrive with a cargo of unsaleable goods. Many of the more expensive items were used as presents for kings and important traders. Some cloths were bought in short lengths for the purpose of unweaving them, to incorporate the silk or wool or dyed cotton yarn in locally-woven cloth.¹⁰

Not all the imports of cloth came from Europe or Asia. In the

late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, considerable quantities of cloth from Benin and Ijebu in what is now southern Nigeria, and 'Quaqua' cloths from the Ivory Coast, were taken by European ships to the Gold Coast (which seems to have lacked a local cloth industry in the coastal area), and there exchanged for gold and slaves.¹¹ The 'high cloths' and ordinary cloths woven in the Cape Verde Islands by Afro-Portuguese and their slaves were widely traded for slaves on the Upper Guinea coast, as were local cloths from the Gambia and (until the great famine of the 1710s) from the Senegal.¹² The coastwise export of African cloth seems to have diminished in the eighteenth century, though some of it continued even after the ending of the slave trade.

Cloth, whether locally woven or imported, was used primarily for clothing, though some was also used for bedding and as baby-wrappers, to hold the baby on its mother's back, and for a variety of minor domestic uses. Clothing for a woman implied at least a waist wrapper some $1\frac{1}{2}$ to 2 yards by $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1 yard; all but the very poorest women expected some sort of upper garment, usually of similar dimensions, at least in their more mature years, and a baby wrapper if needed. Men on the Guinea coast might wear little more than a loincloth (such as a Quaqua cloth), but if well-to-do would require a large cloth in addition; the second-hand sheets, possibly locally dyed, suggest men's cloths, and most of the woollens would have been more suitable for men's wear.

Beads

A considerable quantity of beads was generally included in a cargo. But even more than with cloth, the demand for beads in any one locality was restricted to a few types, and these were subject to the vicissitudes of fashion. However, fashions sometimes persisted; as early as the seventeenth century there was a demand in Whydah and the Niger Delta for the small beads of the kinds still used at the present day in ceremonial beadwork in Yorubaland and in Cameroon, while the Gambia was already demanding amber, as it was to do a century later in Mungo Park's time.¹³ Many of the beads were of Venetian manufacture, but the Dutch were already making imitations by the middle of the seventeenth century.¹⁴ There were also very valuable local beads,

the famous 'aggrey' beads, which were in demand on the Gold Coast; their source has never been properly identified, though they seem to have come from somewhere in the Niger Delta.¹⁵ By the eighteenth century, beads for the African trade were being made in many parts of western Europe. Knowledge of local African preference was essential for success in the bead trade, and not all imitations were acceptable.

Metals and hardware

Iron bars were much in demand. Iron was smelted in most regions of the coast, but the quantities produced were evidently insufficient, particularly on the Upper Guinea coast. Moreover, in many areas the local product was inferior. Some of the imported iron was doubtless forged into spear- and arrow-heads, but in the early eighteenth century it was noted that the demand for iron was greatest in the planting season,¹⁶ which was the time of year when war was least common. It is likely that most of the iron went into the making of hoes and knives. In the Senegambia region, the bar of iron became the unit of account in the export trade. A great many knives of all sizes were imported, particularly the larger ones known on the Gold Coast as 'cutlasses' and in the Niger Delta as 'machetes'. These large blades could be used as weapons, but were probably mainly used as tools in agriculture, as they are today. Brass, in the form of rods, of brass manillas, and of bowls of all sizes and shapes, was a commodity much in demand. Many of the bowls were doubtless second-hand or rejects: one account mentions how the African buyers used to inspect them for holes.¹⁷ They were used for many household purposes, and for salt-boiling in some areas; a number of the larger and more decorative ones acquired a ritual use as containers for 'fetishes'. It was alleged that they were sometimes filed down into 'false gold' to be traded to the unwary ship's captain.¹⁸

Alcohol and tobacco

Much publicity has been given to the import of alcohol into West Africa in this period, and to the picture of Africans selling their wives and children for a few drinks. In practice, the quantities of alcohol were usually small, at least until the later eighteenth

century; but, of course, there were always a few conspicuously rich or important men who over-indulged. Much of the alcohol imported was used for oiling the wheels of commerce, being employed for the various forms of commission, customary dues, gifts and bribes that went by the name of 'custom'; much also was needed for the consumption of resident European traders, many of whom drank very heavily. In addition, however, alcohol in standardised containers took its place alongside other trade goods in the local price-lists of the period, and was frequently included in the purchase price of slaves.¹⁹

Tobacco was almost a monopoly of the Brazilian traders, though both English and Dutch tried to produce similar tobacco in the West Indies. The Bahia tobacco was of third grade, considered too poor for consumption in metropolitan Portugal; it had to be treated with molasses before export, to prevent it breaking up altogether. The resulting product proved an indispensable item of trade on many parts of the coast, so that traders of other nations bought it from the Brazilian ships.²⁰ A related import was that of clay tobacco pipes, some from Merseyside.

Firearms and gunpowder

The import of firearms into West Africa in any significant numbers began at much the same time as the large-scale export of slaves, in the mid-seventeenth century, and there is an obvious connection between the two. Many defective weapons were sent, though not all were necessarily accepted. By the 1680s, African traders were demanding 'bright' muskets, probably as distinct from rusty ones (though there was also a market for guns with black barrels).²¹ It was usual for purchasers to test their guns with a blank charge before accepting them. Sales of gunpowder depended a good deal on the prospect of war in the near future,²² a prospect regarded with mixed feelings by resident traders, since war usually meant more slaves for sale, but could temporarily disorganise the entire transport and marketing system.

Gold

The Brazilians could legally export only tobacco to West Africa; all other Brazilian produce, and especially gold, had to be sent to

Lisbon. In practice, considerable quantities of Brazilian gold were smuggled out of the country, and brought to West Africa, especially to Whydah, and used there to purchase slaves who were needed partly for the mining of gold in Brazil.²³ There was a period in the later eighteenth century when gold was actually taken from Europe to the Gold Coast, since Gold Coast traders had begun to demand gold for their slaves.²⁴ This must have been the time when the gilded splendour of the Ashanti court was being built up; it is also possible that some of the gold mined in Ashanti was being drawn away northwards to pay for prestige imports, and that some of the imported gold found its way back to Europe through Dutch hands. Nevertheless, it remains something of a mystery how it could ever have paid anyone to carry gold to the Gold Coast.

Cowries and manillas

Between the Gold Coast and the Niger (and a great way inland), the currency was cowrie shells; African traders often demanded a third or a half of the price of the slaves in cowries. These shells came originally from the Maldive Islands, reaching the main European market of Amsterdam by way of Ceylon; their cost price fluctuated greatly, and Europeans disliked them as trade goods because they were so easily pilfered; but in this, as in other matters, they had to follow the local demand. Despite the very large quantities imported, there is no evidence of serious inflation of the cowrie currency during the slave trade period.²⁵

Manillas were a form of brass bracelet, of which the commonest form was too small for wear. Like cowries, these may have been in use as currency before the Portuguese arrived in West Africa, and both were certainly employed in the early sixteenth-century slave trade in the Delta.²⁶ Like cowries, their use long outlived the slave trade.

Guinée cloth

Guinées were cotton cloths from south-east India, dyed a dark indigo blue. The currency use of *guinées* in the Senegal area dates only from the later eighteenth century, when they replaced an earlier currency of local cotton cloth.²⁷ They had long been

imported as trade goods by the Dutch and the French, and owed their acceptability as currency largely to the continuing demand for them by the Moors of the desert.

With the exception of firearms and gunpowder, none of the trade goods was new to the Guinea coast. Most parts of the coast that were involved in the slave trade had already been trading with Europeans in gold, ivory, gum, and local products such as the cloth and beads which were used for trading on other parts of the coast, and sometimes in foodstuffs. Very few of the trade goods were new types of commodity even when first introduced by Europeans—cloth, beads and iron were all produced locally in considerable quantities, though in some areas, such as the southern part of what is now Ghana, certain crafts such as weaving may have been absent. Alcohol, but probably not distilled liquors, was well known; tobacco, though a New World introduction, was well established in local taste, and was being locally grown, before the large-scale slave trade began. On the import side, therefore, there was little need to create new patterns of demand; in many areas, however, much larger quantities of the same kinds of trade goods came to be demanded—reflecting, no doubt, the growing area affected by external trade. An exception was the trade in firearms, where the nature of the slave-getting process served to stimulate demand. The seventeenth century saw considerable developments in the technology of hand-guns, which no doubt influenced both their cost and their usefulness.

METHODS OF TRADING

In the earlier days of the large-scale Atlantic slave trade, the chartered companies of various European nations held monopolies over the trade of their own nationals, and attempted to oust the other nations from the trade. Their monopoly was always challenged by 'interlopers', who generally avoided the main places of trade, but were often able to undercut them elsewhere; various arrangements were later made to license 'separate traders'. The merchants of the trading companies operated through established relations with the local chiefs and traders, agreeing with them the prices of the main categories of trade goods, and also the dues payable to them for various services.

Some of these arrangements, particularly on the Gold Coast, went back to the period when slaves were a small part of the trade. Frequently a subsidy was paid to the local chief on condition that he refrained from trading with interlopers or ships of other nationalities. On the Gold Coast, where the European traders built forts to secure their trade, relations between fort and chief were often ambiguous, the payments being regarded by the Europeans as a form of rent, and by the Africans as a form of tribute. In general, it was to their mutual advantage for traders and chiefs to keep on good terms and maintain the structure of trade. This delicate structure was threatened by the 'interlopers', who ignored the carefully negotiated prices and undermined the entire basis of trade.

The resident traders sent home lists of trade goods in demand, and maintained stores in the main trading-posts; from these, goods were drawn to purchase slaves at agreed prices from the local African traders. Each main fort had a secure area where the slaves were 'stored' until the arrival of a ship to carry them across the Atlantic. 'Out-forts' and minor posts received smaller quantities of goods by canoe from the main post. If the correspondence is to be believed, quantities were always too small, quality too low, and goods were of the wrong kind or colour—never could the expected number of slaves be bought. On the other hand, again according to the correspondence, the resident merchants of the out-forts and minor posts, in addition to being quarrelsome and drunk, were constantly engaged in such practices as selling company's goods to 'interlopers' for their own profit, instead of obtaining slaves for the company, or selling them the best of the slaves they had obtained.²⁸ From some of the minor posts, the companies expected to obtain timber, canoes and supplies of foodstuffs to hold for the use of the slave-ships. A famine or bad harvest, which might fill the slave-market with the dependants whom local households could not feed, could also present the slave-traders with difficulties in finding the food required for the passage of the slaves to America.

It was only on the Gold Coast that the chartered company system was in full operation, though the forts on the Gambia and at Whydah on the Dahomey coast worked on much the same system, but without out-forts—as did the English trading-posts in the Sierra Leone area. By the mid-eighteenth century, interlopers

and licensed traders had made such inroads into the system that the English abolished it, establishing a non-trading company to maintain the forts; the resident traders were permitted to trade on their own account, and were frequently the largest traders in the locality. The Dutch West India Company continued to operate, but was unable to exclude other traders from Holland or elsewhere. In this later period, ships bought slaves mainly from the resident European traders, who in turn bought them from African traders; but many small purchases, of usually one or two slaves only, were made direct from local African traders by ships' captains and supercargoes.²⁹ Many ships preferred to trade at smaller places where there was no fort or trading-post. Traders sought protection from a local chief, to whom they made suitable presents. They then could either advance goods on credit, or wait for trade to arrive: 'The former is the most expeditious way, when they fall into good hands; but the latter is always the safest.'³⁰ Granting credit was nothing new—the chartered companies had done it for African traders known to them, and credit had formed a regular part of trade at Benin in the seventeenth century, when cloths were purchased there for the Gold Coast trade.³¹ As numbers of slaves and prices increased, and as slaves were brought from further afield, credit, too, was extended further.

MONEY AND BARGAINING

Whether the buying of slaves was done by the captains and supercargoes of ships, or by resident European merchants, some amount of bargaining was involved.³² In early years, and in out-of-the-way places, every transaction may have involved a separate act of barter, in which each side satisfied itself that the commodity received was worth more than the commodity surrendered. But where a regular trade developed, trade goods soon acquired regular fixed values in terms of a unit of account such as the iron bar in Senegambia, or the ounce of gold dust on the Gold Coast. At the same time, the price of a slave was expressed in the same units, and it thus became possible to include different types of trade goods in the purchase price of a slave. (On the Dahomey coast, where, until the mid-eighteenth century, the slave himself was the unit, it was customary to bargain that out of a consignment of slaves, so many should be paid for in cowries, so many

in particular types of cloth, and so on. Eventually the Dahomey coast adopted the trade ounce.) While the bar or ounce values of trade goods were not wholly immutable, they tended to change much less rapidly than the costs of production of the goods, especially in the eighteenth century when mechanised production was lowering the prices of many goods. The European traders naturally tried to pay as far as possible in the cheaper goods. Where, as in the case of French brandy, these were also the popular goods, everyone was happy; but where the popular goods were, or had become, relatively expensive, there was considerable scope for bargaining as to the proportions of the various types of goods to be included in the price of a slave.

The price of a slave did not remain constant in terms of the units of account, though it was often fixed for a trading season at a particular port. The price may originally have been as low as one gold ounce (about £4, or goods to an equivalent value on the Guinea coast, worth about £2 in England); by the early eighteenth century the price was about three ounces on the Gold Coast; by the end of the century, something like twelve or thirteen ounces. To a limited extent, the rise in price was countered by a devaluation of the ounce as cloth could be cut shorter, alcohol diluted, gunpowder mixed with charcoal. Attempts were also made to substitute cheaper goods, like those Manchester manufactures which were rejected by the more expert among the African traders.³³ The fact that African traders did reject goods, and that they could demand and obtain consistently higher prices as time went on, may suggest that they were by no means the helpless victims of an 'unequal trade', but rather that they were in a position to dictate the terms of trade to the European merchants. It may also suggest that the cost of obtaining slaves was rising, probably in the main because they were brought from further and further afield.

It has been suggested by various writers from the seventeenth century onwards that slaving was the business of 'kings, rich men, and prime merchants, exclusive of the inferior sort of blacks', because of the capital involved in obtaining slaves.³⁴ There is no doubt that many of the Africans involved in the slave trade fell into these social categories, including most of those about whom anything is known. Powerful chiefs could organise wars and slave-raids, and could obtain slaves as tribute; wealthy traders

could act as brokers in the trade, and not a few of them eventually made themselves independent chiefs of the coastal towns. Other traders were agents for those kings who were able to take part in the trade on their own account. Nevertheless, there were always small-scale traders at work, men who relied upon credit from ships or resident merchants before they could embark on trade, and who brought their slaves in ones and twos.³⁵ In smaller places, away from the posts of the European companies, most of the trade was done by small men, most of the purchases made in ones and twos. Many of the large-scale traders belonged to ethnic or quasi-ethnic groups which had long specialised in trade, as had the Dyula and the Dyakhanke in the western part of West Africa, the Akanni of the Gold Coast, or the Aro of the Niger Delta. Some of these groups had originally traded in gold, and had adapted their trading system to the slave trade. Many of the groups were Muslims; and the Aro were able to use the sanction of the Aro Chuku oracle. One such network in the Senegambia/Upper Guinea coast area was that of the 'Portuguese', that is, the Afro-Portuguese descendants of traders operating from the Cape Verde Islands. Many of these had broken free from Portuguese imperial control, and had become permanently committed to the long-distance trade of the mainland, marrying local wives and establishing relations with local chiefs, while remaining nominally Catholics. Trading networks of this kind usually involved resident traders in the market towns, who served as innkeepers and brokers to those who travelled with the slave-caravans; sometimes it was the caravan leader himself who acted as broker.³⁶ Very frequently there was some official who collected taxes for the king or chief; in the case of both Ashanti and Dahomey, the king himself was an important trader with special privileges, his agents being the most important African traders in the coast town.

Resident European merchants had to keep on good terms with merchants, royal agents, and caravan leaders. Especially where there were several different European nations present, considerable quantities of goods were expended as gifts, and some degree of support was often given in local wars. In return, the Europeans hoped for exclusive trading privileges.

In some cases, the African merchants from the coast went inland to purchase slaves. This seems to have been generally the case on the Gold Coast, where there were recognised slave-

markets not very far inland; here and in Dahomey slaves from up-country were generally sold 'from hand to hand', so that long-distance caravans did not reach the coast. On the other hand, in Senegambia it was common for a slave caravan to bring the slaves all or most of the way to the river ports. Elsewhere, according to the account of a Liverpool slave-trader, slaves were bought from 'Black Traders' who were princes and headmen and who travelled into the 'interior country' to purchase slaves; they obtained 'passports' from the intermediate states, went to markets in the interior where slaves were sold, and could be away for a month or more. In the Niger Delta, slaves were bought from the king at Bonny, and from important traders at New Calabar. 'These Traders go up into the Country to purchase Slaves. They go up the Rivers to the Distance of about Eighty Miles from Bonny, and the same from New Calabar, in large Canoes with two or three principal Persons, and about Forty Men in each. The Canoes go in a Body all together to defend themselves if attacked. At the Head of these Two Rivers there is a Mart for Trade where the Black Traders purchase these Slaves of other Black Traders, who bring them from the interior Country.' These Delta traders came down once a fortnight with 20 or 30 canoes, sometimes less, each with 20 or 30 slaves, who had their arms tied behind their backs with twigs, canes, grass rope or other 'ligaments of the country', and, in the case of strong slaves, they were also tied above the knee; they were thrown into the bottom of the canoe where they remained in great pain. When the slaves reached the trader's house, they were oiled, fed, and 'made up for sale'.³⁷ Slaves brought by land were brought in 'droves of 20, 30, or 40, chained together';³⁸ strong men might have a log attached to their arms. Another description runs: 'their Way of bringing them is, tying them by the Neck with Leather-Thongs, at about a yard distance from each other, 30 or 40 in a String, having generally a Bundle of Corn or an Elephant's Tooth upon each of their Heads'; these slaves had also to carry water-skins for their own use.³⁹ However they travelled, the movement of large numbers of slaves called for considerable quantities of foodstuffs to be available along the route. If accounts of the nineteenth-century caravans and slave-markets are anything to go by, food was often specially grown for this purpose by slave-labour, usually under the control of resident African traders.⁴⁰

Although there are accounts of wanton brutality, it was in the interests of the traders and caravan leaders to deliver their slaves alive and looking reasonably fit. This consideration sometimes resulted in callous treatment of the sick and weak, who could be sacrificed in the interests of the health of the remainder of the caravan; moreover, attempts at escape were often punished savagely as a warning to others. But losses on the way to the ports seem not to have been on the scale of the terrible toll of the trans-Saharan trade with its melancholy trail of skeletons. Slave-caravans travelled armed, a necessity in hostile country; on occasion they added to the number of the slaves at the expense of the less well-armed local population, making the latter even more hostile to subsequent caravans.

ENSLAVEMENT

It may well be asked how it came about that so many people were available to be marched to the coast in slave-caravans—though before the last half-century of the Atlantic trade, this question seems to have occurred to surprisingly few people.⁴¹ Amongst those who offered any answer to this question at the time, there was a general consensus of opinion that people were enslaved as criminals, debtors and prisoners of war; Mungo Park added the victims of famine, and many observers also added victims of kidnapping.⁴² There is disagreement as to the proportions in the various categories, as there is on the wider question of the extent to which African societies were distorted to provide slaves, that is, whether wars were waged mainly for the purpose of obtaining slaves, and whether legal process was abused to add to the supply of saleable victims. The only statistical evidence about the causes of enslavement comes from the period after the legal abolition of the slave trade, from records of interviews conducted in the 1850s by a linguist, S. W. Koelle, among slaves released and brought to Sierra Leone; these records have been analysed by Paul Hair.⁴³ Of those interviewed, 11 per cent admitted to having been sold after being condemned by judicial process, 7 per cent to pay debts, generally incurred by others; 30 per cent had been kidnapped; and 34 per cent were taken in war. There is an additional category, 'sold by relatives and superiors', amounting to 7 per cent of the total; some of these slaves, as Hair suggests, may

actually have been 'criminals' by the laws of their own society. But sometimes there was also a history of family quarrels or jealousy: such causes have brought victims to the slave-markets since the days of Joseph and his brethren.

It is possible that this sample, which was chosen by Koelle to include as many different languages as possible, may over-state judicial process, family quarrel and kidnapping as causes of enslavement. Of those taken in war, many were the victims of the wars and raids associated with the Fulani *jihad*; similar conditions obtained in the eighteenth century in certain areas. Lieutenant Matthews stated in the 1780s that 'the nations which inhabit the interior parts of Africa, east of Sierra Leone, profess the Mahometan religion; and following the means prescribed by their prophet, are perpetually at war with the surrounding nations who refuse to embrace their religious doctrines. . . . The prisoners made in these religious wars furnish a great part of the slaves which are sold to the Europeans. . . .' Elsewhere he spoke of great numbers taken as prisoners of war, and brought down, fifty or a hundred together, by the black slave merchants. He denied the accusation that war was instigated by the European traders; whenever the people at the sea-coast were at war, it put an entire stop to trade.⁴⁴ Probably the expectation of selling prisoners of war entered into the decision whether or not to wage war and it is unlikely that without this resource, wars could have continued so long or on such a large scale.

Kidnapping must have taken place at times, despite the denials of some of the more biased observers. Well-governed states were perhaps able to prevent the practice within their own boundaries, but their demands for tribute must surely have encouraged it beyond the frontiers. Descriptions of the 'breaking' of towns and villages by kings and chiefs⁴⁵ may refer to the over-vigorous collection of tax or tribute, or punishment for rebellion. But there were also instances where organised raiding took place—the activities of the African dealers in 'black gold' in the hinterland of Accra are vividly described by the eighteenth-century Dane, Roemer; the victims of these villains were taken secretly to the coast, hidden in the houses of the resident brokers, and smuggled aboard the slave-ships by night.⁴⁶ Pawning a person for debt was a normal, accepted, and probably traditional legal process; it carried the implication that if the debt was not paid, the pawn

could be sold. Some of the victims, however, seem to have been sold before there was time to repay the debt. It was also normal to 'panyar' or kidnap a member of the debtor's family, or a fellow-townsmen, to enforce the repayment of debts; such persons were normally redeemed by the repayment of the debt, but in case of failure, they too could be sold. Europeans on the coast resorted to both practices, and it is difficult to see what other security could have been offered for debt, except possibly certain items of the royal regalia. Occasionally the tables were turned, when a chief offered a wife as security, and she succeeded in seducing the merchant; having committed a capital offence, he had to buy his pardon.⁴⁷

Crimes were of various kinds; murder, theft, adultery and witchcraft. The high proportion of cases attributed to adultery may be due, as one of the 1789 witnesses suggested, to the fact that this was the only crime to which slaves would admit.⁴⁸ Conviction for witchcraft and, in some places, certain crimes against the chief, involved the enslavement not only of the offender, but of his entire family. Opponents of the slave trade, then and later, claimed that new crimes were invented and trumped-up charges accepted, because of the profit from selling convicted criminals. It must certainly have been a standing temptation to those who stood to gain from the sale of criminals, to multiply the offences for which the criminal could be sold; but some of the offences which appeared and still appear trivial to European observers undoubtedly loomed much larger in the thinking of the local society.

PROFIT AND LOSS

There has been much discussion about the profitability of the slave trade to the European traders involved in it, and to the New World slave-owners. Here we must consider the balance sheet of profit and loss in Africa.⁴⁹ For the slaves, it was almost all loss, loss of freedom, loss of family and friends, and, for one in seven or so, loss of life itself. No one would now accept the argument used by some of the slave-traders to justify themselves, that life in Africa was in general so nasty, brutish and short that any alternative, even the Middle Passage and New World chattel slavery, was preferable. Certainly the victims themselves did not think so, to judge by the attempts at escape and the frequency of

suicide. For a few it may have been true that the alternative to deportation and slavery was capital punishment.

As to the country they left behind, it would seem at first sight that the loss of some millions of people, the majority of them adults in their most productive years, from a continent where there were usually too few people rather than too little land, could only have had disastrous effects, both on population and on the economy. So far as population is concerned, recent work has shown that the loss, taken over West Africa as a whole, was probably not very serious, amounting at its worst to little more than the natural increase. Moreover, the really large and steady drain of population in the latter (and larger) part of the trade was from areas which are now, and probably were then, exceptional for the density of their population: the very areas where today it is shortage of land, not of manpower, that is the limiting factor. The present high reproduction rate in south-eastern Nigeria could have arisen as a response to the losses of the slave trade, and remained, after the manner of such adaptations, long after the emergency was past.⁵⁰

It is evident that the removal of some millions of workers must have reduced production but at the same time it must have reduced consumption. Overall, the loss would depend on how much more they produced than they consumed and this must have varied from one part of West Africa to another. If West Africa had represented, as has been sometimes assumed, merely a homogeneous subsistence economy, producing only enough for home consumption, there would have been no loss. But, in fact, in many areas it was possible, with existing agricultural tools and methods, to produce something like double the cultivator's needs. Had slaves been drawn to any great extent from those areas, there would have been an overall loss of about half the total production. However, these are just the areas where it paid to keep slaves on the land and once established on the land, slaves were normally sold only for crimes, or in cases of dire necessity.⁵¹

At the other end of the scale were the areas in which people could produce little or nothing beyond their own needs, either because the land was inherently unproductive or because it had lost its fertility from over-use, or because population pressure limited the land available to each household. The first kind of area, common in the so-called Middle Belt, was always an area

of low population density, and therefore vulnerable to slave-raiding. The more vigorous peoples were able to fend off mounted raiders by the use of poisoned arrows and hooked throwing knives, against which cavalry could only defend themselves by losing most of their mobility, but against firearms they had little or no defence. In many places the survivors took refuge in even less fertile, but defensible, areas of hill country where they could live, precariously and laboriously, out of reach of human predators.⁵²

Areas of population dense enough to cause land shortage were rare in West Africa, but the hinterland of the Niger Delta slaving ports was most probably such a region, as it is today. Here a steady drain of population was positively advantageous to those who remained behind, and hence the Ibo people evolved a system whereby the Aro Chuku shrine and the Aro traders between them were able to provide a steady flow of surplus manpower to the coasts. The shrine was a court of appeal, the loser running the risk of being 'sold down the river', or being fined a large number of slaves.⁵³ In this area there was no question of depopulation, and it could be argued that the shrine provided a self-regulating mechanism for relieving population pressure—the heavier the pressure, the more cases before the court, and the more people exported. Such considerations would be little comfort to the victims, but it could be argued that without this outlet, serious over-population problems would earlier have been encountered in Ibo country.

Since a considerable proportion of the slaves exported came either from areas of dense population which had evolved a mechanism for relieving population pressure, or from the vulnerable areas of sparse population and low productivity, the actual loss in production in West Africa may have been little more than the consumption of those who were removed. Correspondingly, their productivity was probably much higher in New World plantation agriculture, on new land, than it had been in Africa, but this global benefit did not for the moment affect Africa.

For those who remained in West Africa, increasing quantities of consumption goods became available by import, usually at much lower prices than the corresponding local product. It is often suggested that these imports were at the expense of local handicrafts,⁵⁴ and in some instances this may be true. It is prob-

able that iron smelting in coastal districts was particularly affected (though in some places, local iron had already given way to imported iron before slaves became a significant export). But in general, handicraft industries survived, sometimes making use of imported raw material. Imports of iron, while they may have had a deleterious effect on local smelting, did provide iron for the making of essential tools for farming, cheaper and in many cases of better quality than tools made of local iron. Craftsmen, whether members of specialised castes as in much of the savannah area, or court craftsmen, or others who had acquired specialised skills, were normally regarded as immune from sale as slaves (though they could be transferred from a defeated West African state to its conqueror). This may account for the limited transfer to the New World of African technology in the crafts. West Africa thus avoided the loss of the most skilled of its manpower; in terms of skill, as in terms of geographical location, it was the least productive who were lost.

There can be no doubt that, as Professor Fage has pointed out,⁵⁸ African commerce gained greatly from the slave trade, not only by direct participation in the trade but also by the demand it created for local foodstuffs, both to feed the slaves on their way to the ports and to provision the slave-ships. It helped to bring to Africa buyers of gold, ivory, timber, dyewoods, gum and other produce, and it created or expanded African trade networks. Many merchants, African and mulatto, made fortunes directly or indirectly from the trade: John Cabes at Commenda, John Conny at Princes Town, the de Souzas at Whydah or the Brews at Anomabu, to give examples only from the central section of the coast; and some achieved positions of political importance. Several major polities had the slave trade as their economic base; Dahomey is the classic example, but much the same is true of Ashanti and perhaps of Oyo, and of the smaller states of the Niger Delta. Sometimes the king himself was an important slave-trader, and always he was able to tax independent traders.

It is, however, an exaggeration to suggest that only kings and important chiefs could benefit from the trade, because they alone could afford to make war or equip a slave-raiding expedition. The small man could also benefit: as a soldier he could take prisoners; as a kidnapper he could capture the unwary traveller or lost children in the woods; as a creditor he could sometimes

foreclose upon the unfortunate individual pledged to him; as the accuser in a witchcraft or adultery case he could sometimes acquire a slave for sale.⁵⁶ The log-books of slaving voyages are full of transactions in which only one or two slaves are sold by an individual, and these can hardly be the transactions of kings or large-scale dealers. Many more small transactions must have taken place between up-country sellers and the long-distance traders or the coastal brokers, whose function was a 'bulking' one.

If some elements of society gained, others as surely lost by the Atlantic slave trade. The very uneven economic development which is perhaps the most serious problem in most African states today must have been encouraged by the slave trade, since it tended to penalise areas which were ill-endowed and economically backward. Further, it is arguable (the argument would have more force if it were not so frequently overstated) that the economy, legal structure, and political organisation of participating African societies were grossly distorted by the slave trade.⁵⁷ Much of the argument concerning the distortion of the economy could be applied with equal force to any external trade, particularly in an underdeveloped situation. Trade encourages rising expectations in terms of imported goods, which come to be considered necessities, only to be obtained by continuing and intensifying the trade. In a sense, it was the previous trade in gold that made the Gold Coast so easy a victim of the slave trade, just as it was the trade in ivory, copper and dyewood that tempted Loango into the slave trade.⁵⁸ Accelerating exports of palm oil and cocoa and groundnuts in more recent times have had a similar distorting effect—the economy was made vulnerable to changes in external demand over which producers had no control. Expectations were as brutally denied by the great depression of the 1930s as by abolition in the 1800s.

Distortion of the legal structure doubtless varied from district to district. In some localities there can be little doubt that the law was operated to the private economic advantage of chiefs and other prominent persons, but in many cases, sale overseas provided a way of ridding the community of criminals and misfits without actual bloodshed. Distortion of political organisation is particularly difficult to assess, since there is no means of knowing what the undistorted structure would have been. Some witnesses

before the 1789 inquiry into the slave trade suggested that wars were made in West Africa for much the same reasons as in contemporary Europe. This may well have been true; the kings of Ashanti and Dahomey both disclaimed the idea that they made wars for the purpose of obtaining slaves, but the fact that war could be made to pay for itself must have strengthened the hand of the 'war party', and made possible the incorporation of many underdeveloped areas in the larger kingdoms. Witnesses were also clear that kidnapping was rare in the strong kingdoms; a strong state was one which could defend its own citizens, and impose upon its neighbours the duty to provide slaves.

If, as has been recently reasserted, 'the slave trade underdeveloped Africa' it did so, not because it was an external trade, but because it was a trade in human beings, whose supply could only be maintained at increasing cost, not only to the traders who dealt in slaves, but also to the communities from which the slaves were ultimately drawn, the vulnerable populations of the poorest areas.

NOTES

- 1 The present paper represents in part a 'spin-off' from research on the economic history of West African textiles. I am grateful to the Social Science Research Council for support in this research during 1971-4.
- 2 'The remarkable expansion of the slave trade in the eighteenth century provides a horrific illustration of the rapid response of producers in an underdeveloped economy to price incentives,' A. G. Hopkins, *An economic history of West Africa* (1973), p. 105; this work includes an interesting and balanced discussion of the Atlantic slave trade in relation to the West African economy (pp. 89-111). For revised figures of the numbers involved, see P. D. Curtin, *The Atlantic slave trade: a census* (Madison, 1969); the figures are summarised in J. D. Fage, *A history of West Africa* (revised ed. 1969), pp. 81-9, where the question of demographic loss is discussed. See also Fage's article in R. P. Moss and J. A. R. Rathbone (eds.), *The population factor in African studies* (1975), pp. 15-23.
- 3 A rare exception is the set of extracts from the diary of Antera Duke, 1785-8, published in Daryll Forde (ed.), *Efik traders of Old Calabar* (1956).
- 4 Probably the most useful single source is the *Report of the Lords of the Committee of the Privy Council relating to Trade and Plantations . . . on the Slave Trade, 1789* (hereafter *1789 Report*): unpaginated, it is cited below by the names of witnesses giving evidence. Sections were reprinted in E. Donnan, *Documents illustrative of the slave trade to America*, 4 vols. (1930-5) (hereafter Donnan), the first two volumes of which contain numerous extracts bearing on the African end of the

trade. Records of the English companies are to be found in the Public Record Office in London, mainly in the T70 series, and also under CO 338. Further papers are in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, catalogued as Rawlinson C745-7 (hereafter Rawlinson). The records of the Dutch West India companies are in the State Archives at The Hague, and most of the material relevant for this paper is catalogued under 2°WIC (hereafter Hague 2°WIC).

- 5 The experience of the Congo/Angola area is treated in D. Birmingham, *Trade and conflict in Angola* (1966); and the argument that the demographic consequences were different in this region is expounded in W. G. L. Randles, 'La civilisation bantou, son essor et son déclin', *Annales*, 29 (1974), pp. 272-4; R. Anstey, *The Atlantic slave trade and British abolition, 1760-1810* (1975) (hereafter Anstey), chap. 3.
- 6 It is impossible to include more than a minute fraction of the references in trade lists, inventories and accounts to the various kinds of trade goods. Lists with some detail as to provenance, values, etc. are to be found in J. Adams, *Remarks on the country extending from Cape Palmas to the river Congo* (1823) (hereafter Adams), Appendix; S. Berbain, *Le comptoir français de Juda (Ouidah) au XVIII^e siècle (Mémoires de l'Institut Français d'Afrique Noire, 3)* (Dakar, 1942); and in various ships' papers printed in Donnan. The papers of the *Maria Gertruda*, Hague 2°WIC 179, include a set of samples of the textiles in demand in the late eighteenth century. Silks were most in demand on the Whydah coast (modern Dahomey), at least in the seventeenth century: PRO T70/20, dated 13.10.1680, from Ophra in Airda, asks for 'good flowrd silks some purple flowers, other vermillion flowers: it matters not though they be out of fashion in England, so they be but gaudy and large flowers they will be taken here'. Japanese dressing gowns are mentioned in Hague 2°WIC 1042 (1690-1); 'Cheany' (China) silks in PRO T70/20/3. India silks included taffeta, see P. Isert, *Voyages en Guinée* (Paris, 1973), p. 109, 'taffetas rayé'; or Berbain's trading accounts. Another silk or half-silk cloth was 'sastracundic', alias 'Sister Gandi', of which there is a sample in the *Maria Gertruda* books. Some of the Indian handkerchiefs or romals were also silk or part-silk. Woollens included perpetuanas (usually blue, though the Akwamu behind Accra liked green, PRO T70/22/36), sayes and long clls - all relatively light-weight fabrics. Silesian linens, alias 'platillas', were popular through the slave trade period, but the most popular linen item, at least in the first half, was the bed-sheet from Holland, usually described in English records, and sometimes in Dutch, as old or second-hand. As many as 50,000 of these might be in stock at Cape Coast, but were soon disposed of, PRO T70/230, Inventories. Cheap Indian cottons of bewildering variety can be traced in the trade lists, inventories, and the English Customs accounts, where English imitations can also be traced, PRO CUST 3.
- 7 Adams, p. 237.
- 8 S. M. X. Golbery, *Travels in Africa* (1802), vol. 1, p. 190; Adams, p. 235.
- 9 See E. Lipson, *Economic history of England*, vol. 3 (3rd ed. 1943), pp. 37ff.
- 10 Adams, pp. 79-80; T. E. Bowdich, *Mission from Cape Coast Castle to Ashantee* (1819, reprinted 1966), pp. 331-2; letter of Robert Parker from Commenda 1737, saying that large quantities of woollen imports

- were taken up country and there 'taken a Pieces and unwove and again made into Cloth of their own dividing', *Historical Manuscripts Commission, 11th Report: Townshend MSS*, Appendix, pt. IV, p. 355, quoted in Donnan, 2, p. 192n.
- 11 Benin cloths are constantly referred to in English and Dutch records of the later seventeenth century, e.g. Hague 2^eWIC 124. Ijebu cloths also appear in these records, and are still found in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, e.g. Adams, p. 97; G. A. Robertson, *Notes on Africa* (1819), p. 301. Both sources mention that Ijebu cloths were exported to Brazil, possibly for the use of the slave population.
 - 12 For Cape Verde cloths, see A. Carreira, *Panaria Cabo-Verdiano-Guineense* (Lisbon, 1968). Gambia cloths are to be found in English records of the later seventeenth century, e.g. PRO T70/60; see also F. Moore, *Travels into the inland parts of Africa* (1739, reprinted 1970) (hereafter Moore), p. 72. For Senegal cloths, see P. D. Curtin, *Economic change in pre-colonial Africa: Senegambia in the era of the slave trade* (1975), p. 213.
 - 13 Most Dutch and English cargoes included quantities of beads. For demand on the Dahomey coast, see Rawlinson C746 38. For amber, see Mungo Park, *Travels in the interior districts of Africa* (1799), p. 356; *Journal of a mission to the interior of Africa in 1805* (1815), pp. xliii, 160-1.
 - 14 Seventeenth-century Dutch beads are in the collections of the Ghana National Museum.
 - 15 J. D. Fage, 'Some remarks on beads and trade in lower Guinea in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries', *Journal of African History* (hereafter *JAH*), 3 (1962), pp. 342-7.
 - 16 PRO T70/22 contains several references to the demand for iron bars in the planting season.
 - 17 Mentioned as early as c. 1600 by P. de Marees, *Beschryvinghe vant Gout Koninkrijk van Gunea* (1602, Linschoten Verceniging 1912), p. 57.
 - 18 'I have heard of those who, depending on their own judgement, have brought to England what they conceived to be boxes of [gold] and which, on inspection, proved to be almost wholly the filings taken from brass pans', Adams, p. 237. There are other references to this practice, e.g. Hague 2^eWIC 97 (13.5.1701).
 - 19 The commonest measure was the anchor (ancre) of brandy; for details of measures, see Berbain, p. 71. For the inclusion of brandy, etc. in the prices paid for slaves, see M. Johnson, 'The eighteenth century ounce', *JAH*, 7 (1966), pp. 197-214.
 - 20 P. Verger, *Le fort St Jean-Baptiste d'Ajuda* (Paris, 1966), pp. 3ff; for purchases of tobacco by ships, see Berbain, Appendix.
 - 21 Donnan, 2, p. 445.
 - 22 See, for example, Rawlinson C745 f. 26, letter from Thelwell at Anomabu, 10.9.1681, 'They say [various peoples] are to fight . . . if so, powder may go off here'; and two days later, 'if war be as they say, powder will goe off', while a neighbouring fort reported that traders had bought all the powder sent. But powder was also in more regular demand for hunting (though possibly this consumed only small quantities) and for firing salutes at funerals.
 - 23 For the Brazil gold trade, see D. P. Henige and M. Johnson, 'Agaja and the slave trade: another look at the evidence', *History in Africa*, 3 (1976).

- 24 Johnson, 'The ounce', *op. cit.*, pp. 203-4.
- 25 M. Johnson, 'The cowrie currencies of West Africa, part II', *JAH*, 9 (1970), pp. 347-9.
- 26 A. F. C. Ryder, 'An early Portuguese trading voyage to the Forcados River', *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, 1 (1951), pp. 301ff; Dutch records refer to manillas as 'gladde armringen' (smooth bracelets), e.g. Hague 2°WIC 97, f. 176v.
- 27 — Saugnier, *Relation de plusieurs voyages à la côte d'Afrique* (Paris, 1791), pp. 289, 292.
- 28 See correspondence with out-forts, Rawlinson, C745-7 *passim*.
- 29 See, for example, the accounts of the *Judith* (1728) and the *Swallow* (1779-81) in Donnan, 2, pp. 372, 612ff; or of the French ship *Dahomet* in Berbain.
- 30 1789 Report, evidence of Lieutenant Matthews.
- 31 E.g. credit granted to John Cabes of Commenda (Donnan, 2, p. 189). For Benin cloths, see W. Bosman, *Description of Guinea* (1705, reprinted 1967), p. 433, and Hague 2°WIC 124 (10.1.1716).
- 32 On systems of money and bargaining, see Johnson, 'The ounce', *op. cit.* The bar currency of Senegambia and the 'Heads of the Goods', i.e. those goods recognised as relatively expensive, were discussed in Moore, p. 45.
- 33 Adams, pp. 253, 258.
- 34 E.g. Hopkins, *Economic history*, *op. cit.*, p. 105.
- 35 See the accounts of trading voyages, for instance, those cited in note 29.
- 36 For the Dyula and Dyakhanke, see Curtin, *Economic change*, *passim*, and Y. Person, *Samori, une révolution Dyula* (Dakar, 1968), *passim*; for the Akanni, see K. Y. Daaku, *Trade and politics on the Gold Coast 1600-1720* (1970); for the Aro, see K. O. Dike, *Trade and politics in the Niger Delta 1830-1885* (1958).
- 37 1789 Report, evidence of James, and Penny (of Liverpool).
- 38 *Ibid.*, evidence of Wadstrom.
- 39 Moore, p. 41; an eyewitness account of a journey with a slave-caravan is contained in Park, *Travels*, chaps XXIV-XXVI.
- 40 E.g. in the Togo/Dahomey area, diary of Captain Kling, *Mitteilungen aus den deutschen Schutzgebieten*, 6 (1893), pp. 108-47.
- 41 Francis Moore was unusual in attempting to answer this question in the 1730s, Moore, p. 41ff; at the 1789 enquiry, it was one of the standard questions asked of witnesses.
- 42 1789 Report, part I; Park (1799), *op. cit.*, p. 212.
- 43 P. E. H. Hair, 'The enslavement of Koelle's informants', *JAH* 6 (1965), pp. 193-203. Dr Hair now writes: 'The percentages given only add up to 89 per cent: the missing 11 per cent represent partly a handful not fitting into the stated categories, but mainly a number who belong to more than one category, e.g. war refugees who were kidnapped. Dr David Northrup, who has re-analysed the material relating to the Delta-Cameroons region, has pointed out to me that the high proportion of prisoners-of-war derives almost solely from Fulani activities among the more Northern peoples, and that the coastal peoples had instead a high proportion of enslavement by relatives and superiors, and by kidnapping. These coastal proportions may have been more typical of the whole slave trade era, at least for regions untroubled by *jihad*.'
- 44 1789 Report, evidence of Lieutenant Matthews.

- 45 *Ibid.*, evidence of Poptlett and others.
- 46 L. F. Roemer, *Nachrichten von der Küste Guinea* (Copenhagen, 1769), pp. 106-10.
- 47 There was an example of this at Accra in the early 1680s, when Wendover was seduced by Boquce, a wife of the king of Akwamu, who was a pawn at the castle; she was eventually sent back to Akwamu, Rawlinson C745, 178, 591.
- 48 1789 *Report*, evidence of Norris.
- 49 For discussion of this aspect of the Atlantic slave trade, see J. D. Fage, 'Slavery and the slave trade in the context of West African history', *JAH*, 10 (1969), pp. 393-404, and *History of West Africa*, pp. 89-95; B. Davidson, *Black Mother* (1961); W. Rodney, *How Europe underdeveloped Africa* (Dar-es-Salaam, 1972); Anstey, *The Atlantic slave trade*, chap. 3.
- 50 *Ibid.*, pp. 89-91.
- 51 1789 *Report*, evidence of Matthews and others. This was a very widespread convention: those born in slavery could only reach the slave markets if captured in war, and would only be recognised as slaves if they remained unassimilated. The 1789 *Report* mentions instances only in Gambia. Descendant slaves, or slaves of the second generation, were often known by a term different from that employed for freshly captured or purchased slaves. It follows that the slave trade did not draw its victims mainly from a local 'slave class', though the markets which provided reinforcements for the local slave population also served the external trade. The concept of the slave as a vendable commodity, rather than as someone to be incorporated in the economy and often in the household, may well derive from the export trade in slaves.
- 52 Skill in making arrow poison was highly localised. Horses and men could be protected with quilted armour, cumbersome and excessively hot. Throwing knives had a wide distribution, both in the Middle Belt and in the desert. The Jos Plateau was a typical refuge area.
- 53 For Aro Chuku, see Dike, *op. cit.*, pp. 37ff.
- 54 E.g. Rodney, *op. cit.*, p. 113.
- 55 Fage, *History of West Africa*, *op. cit.*, pp. 89-92.
- 56 W. E. F. Ward, *History of the Gold Coast* (1948), p. 153.
- 57 E.g. Davidson, *Black Mother*; Rodney, *How Europe underdeveloped Africa*.
- 58 'To refuse to trade in slaves, when both the supply of other commodities, and the demand for them, were dwindling, would result in an economic decline, and in a dangerous failure to meet immediate expectations. Loango therefore became caught. . .', D. Birmingham, 'Central Africa from Cameroun to the Zambezi', *Cambridge History of Africa*, 4 (1975), p. 347. It could even be argued that, with steadily rising prices for slaves, imports increased more than proportionately to exports. As in affluent societies elsewhere, the creation of new consumer wants and expectations was part of the seller's business; on which see D. Rimmer, *Macromancy* (1973).

The slave trade of Bristol with the British mainland colonies in North America 1699-1770

W. E. MINCHINTON

‘The merchants from Bristol carry it on with good success’¹

When the Royal African Company’s monopoly of the English slave trade from West Africa was officially breached in 1698, the first beneficiary was Bristol.² Although some Bristol vessels may have been interlopers in the trade in the later seventeenth century,³ it was not until the 10 per cent act that the participation of the western ports in the slave trade grew. Challenging London for a decade or two,⁴ Bristol became the leading English slave port from the 1720s to the early 1740s. In 1731 and 1732 over half of the English clearances in the slave trade annually were from Bristol.⁵ Then, as Bristol had replaced London, so Bristol in its turn was overtaken by Liverpool, which remained the most important English slave-trading port from the 1740s until the trade came to an end in 1807.

VOLUME AND DIRECTION OF THE TRADE

In the American mainland colonies throughout the period from 1698 to 1775 the major markets were in Virginia and South Carolina but some slaves were also carried to New York, Maryland and Georgia. Of the 39 slave-vessels which are known to have traded with Virginia between 1698 and 1708, 5 came from Bristol and the remainder from London; between 1710 and 1718, 21 out of a total of 66 slave-vessels came from Bristol, 20 from London, 11 from Liverpool and 12 from other English ports; and in the following ten years, 1718-27, Bristol ships

numbered 49 out of a total of 70, with London supplying 15 and Liverpool 5 of the remainder.⁸ From the Mediterranean pass registers it is not usually possible to identify which of the American mainland colonies the vessels were intended for, but the naval office shipping lists and other sources show that Bristol vessels continued to bring slaves, though in declining numbers, to Virginia until the eve of the Revolution. Between 1751 and 1763

TABLE 1 *Number of Bristol slave ships trading with Virginia, 1699-1769: tonnage in brackets when known*

	1699-1710-1718- 1708 1718 1727			1727- 1738	1739- 1747	1749- 1755	1760- 1769	Total
From Africa	4	9	48	29*(2844)	23 (1925)	18 (2060)	8 (1090)	139
From West Indies	1	12	1	5 (400)	3 (312)	2 (300)	—	24
Total	5	21	49	34 (3244)	26 (2237)	20 (2360)	8 (1090)	163

* Includes 2 vessels for which no source of cargo is given.

Bristol ranked second to Liverpool as a slave-trading port. Out of the 52 slave-vessels trading with Virginia, 25 came from Liverpool, 18 from Bristol, 6 from London and 3 from other English ports. As can be seen from Table 1, most of the vessels (85 per cent) came directly from Africa and only a few (15 per cent) via the West Indies. (For the sources of Table 1 and later tables, see Appendix.) Virginia ranked second to South Carolina as an importer of slaves and in most years more Bristol slave-vessels came to Virginia than to South Carolina; but on occasions during the years for which figures are available for both colonies, for instance, in 1731, 1734 and 1739, the reverse was the case. Details of Bristol slavers trading with South Carolina are given in Table 2 but these undoubtedly understate the number of cargoes involved.

Inevitably the number of vessels sailing from Bristol in the slave trade fluctuated considerably from year to year as a result of weather and war, slaving conditions on the West African coast,

market conditions in the American mainland colonies and other factors. Further, when prohibitive duties were imposed in South Carolina on the importation of slaves, the slave trade to that colony came to a standstill.⁷ There were virtually no slave imports into South Carolina between 1741 and 1749 and between 1766 and 1768 inclusive. In the 1740s some of the Bristol vessels which normally brought slaves to South Carolina, such as the *Amoretta*,

TABLE 2 *Number of Bristol slave ships trading with South Carolina, 1717-1765: tonnage in brackets*

	1717- 1719	1724	1730- 1739	1752- 1753	1758- 1760	1763- 1765	Total
From Africa	1 (45)	3 (150)	33 (3140)	1 (130)	10 (1020)	6 (670)	54 (5155)
From West Indies	4 (300)	- —	7 (670)	1 (90)	1 (50)	1 (130)	14 (1240)
Total	5 (345)	3 (150)	40 (3810)	2 (220)	11 (1070)	7 (800)	68 (6395)

Seaflower and *Shepherd*, carried their cargoes to Virginia instead.⁸ The trade was also checked by the non-importation movement in both Virginia and South Carolina in 1770 and brought to a halt by non-importation in 1775. On 29 April 1775 *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal* reported that 'the Catherine, Capt. Frazer of this port, proceeded from the Windward Coast of Africa, to South Carolina with a cargo of slaves, but on her arrival there was not permitted to land one. After being supplied with water and whatever else he wanted, he sailed for St Kitts'.⁹

Of lesser importance was Bristol's slave trade with the other mainland colonies.¹⁰ In the first half of the eighteenth century Bristol merchants appear to have traded infrequently with Maryland. In 1741 Philip Lee, the naval officer in the North Potomac district, reported that he and his partners had 'been employed for some years past by some Merchants in Bristol to sell and dispose of what Negroes they should consign to them'.¹¹ From the mid-century imports of slaves into Maryland declined sharply. Of the 10 vessels which brought 238 slaves to Annapolis be-

tween 1753 and 1765, only one was a Bristol vessel.¹² The *Alexander*, owned by John Fowler & Company of Bristol, entered there with 110 negroes from Africa on 29 July 1761;¹³ but in the previous year another Bristol vessel, the *Diamond*, is said to have lost 99 out of 329 slaves on a voyage from Bonny to Maryland.¹⁴ The 1771 duty on the import of slaves virtually brought the slave trade to Maryland to an end.

When the prohibition of slavery in Georgia was lifted in 1749, negroes at first came coastwise or overland from South Carolina. Later a wider trade developed with slaves at first coming from the West Indies. Of the 136 entries of vessels with slaves recorded between 1755 and 1767, there were only three vessels in some way connected with Bristol. The snow *Fanny*, built in Bristol but registered in St Christophers, carried 13 slaves from St Kitts on 28 December 1764; the schooner *Industry*, registered in Bristol but owned by a Boston merchant, entered with two slaves from Guadeloupe on 31 October 1765; and the brig *Nelly*, registered in New York and part-owned by a Bristol merchant, imported 10 slaves from Jamaica on 7 December 1765.¹⁵ The direct trade between Africa and Georgia only began after 1766. A complete record of this trade is not available but between 1768 and 1771, out of a total of 21 vessels employed, two were Bristol vessels. Together, the *Constantine* in 1768 and the *Gambia* in 1769 brought 390 slaves to Georgia.¹⁶ A small number of negroes were also brought by Bristol vessels from the West Indies to New York. In 1717 the *Illustrious* of Bristol brought one negro from Barbados to New York, as did the *Sarah Galley* in 1726. In 1729 the *Don Carlos* brought 47 negroes from Jamaica and in 1734 the *Prince William* brought two from the same island, while in 1738 the *Torrey* brought eight negroes from Antigua.¹⁷

Although at the beginning of the eighteenth century and infrequently thereafter a number of consignments came via the West Indies,¹⁸ most of the slaves carried to Virginia and South Carolina by Bristol merchants were brought directly from the west coast of Africa.¹⁹ Between 1699 and 1769, 139 Bristol vessels carrying 28,102 slaves came directly to Virginia from Africa²⁰ while 24 came via the West Indies with 2,319 slaves. Sixteen of the latter vessels carried substantial cargoes and accounted for 2,175 (94 per cent) of the total number of slaves carried from the West Indies. Only the other eight (with cargoes

of 3, 20, 30, 6, 8, 41, 19 and 17) conform to the generalisation that slaves formed just one part of a general import trade involving many other goods.²¹ Indeed, as in the case of Captain William Barry of the *Dispatch* in 1725,²² the masters of some Bristol ships were ordered to try to dispose of their cargoes of slaves in South Carolina or Virginia if they failed to find a market for them in the West Indies. For South Carolina the surviving records show that 54 Bristol ships carrying 12,037 slaves entered directly from Africa and 14 vessels carrying 369 slaves entered from the West Indies. As three of the latter carried cargoes of 211, 60 and 42 negroes respectively, the remainder carried only a small number of slaves, together with other commodities.

The third aspect, a very limited trade, was the movement of negroes between the various American mainland colonies.²³ In the case of Virginia this amounted to about 4 per cent of the total slave trade with that colony. In this trade were seven Bristol vessels which brought 51 slaves to Virginia from other mainland colonies between 1725 and 1774.²⁴ Some Bristol vessels also had a limited share in the distribution of slaves to other colonies from Charleston, South Carolina. Finally, in a very small number of cases, one or two slaves, probably employed as servants, were brought to the American mainland colonies from Bristol.²⁵

Though Bristol made but a minor contribution to the slave trade of Georgia and Maryland, she played a substantial role in the supply of slaves to Virginia and South Carolina. Between 1698 and 1715 the trade developed slowly but from the expiration of slave duties in the latter year, Bristol came to dominate the Virginia slave market, as Table 3 shows. Over time the markets for Bristol slaves in Virginia changed. Before 1740 most of Bristol's shipments were concentrated in the York River and those of Liverpool in the Rappahannock. Thus between 1718 and 1727 over 80 per cent of Bristol's slave imports entered through York River. After 1740 Liverpool continued to concentrate on the Rappahannock but Bristol's imports shifted to the expanding tobacco area of the Upper James. Between 1759 and 1766 all Bristol's slave imports were directed to the Upper James.²⁶ In South Carolina, where the demand for slaves grew in the 1720s with the expansion of rice cultivation, Bristol merchants were less dominant. As with Virginia, Bristol was the major supplier of slaves in the 1720s and 1730s, as Table 4

shows, but prohibitive duties in the 1740s then brought the trade to a halt. Though Bristol merchants regained a temporary dominance in the early 1750s, thereafter their position declined. An

TABLE 3 *Bristol slave imports into Virginia, 1699-1769*

	1699- 1708	1710- 1718	1718- 1727	1727- 1738	1739- 1747	1748- 1755	1756- 1769	Total
From Africa	572	1070	7046	6857	5066	4648	2843	28102
From West Indies	67	855	108	618	635	36	—	2319
Total Bristol imports	639	1927*	7154	7475	5701	4684	2843	30423*
Total English imports	6607	4415	11091	13558	10453	7993	7791	61908
Bristol imports as percentage of total English imports	9.7	43.6	64.5	55.1	54.5	58.6	36.5	49.1

* Includes 2 slaves from Bristol in 2 Bristol ships.

TABLE 4 *Bristol slave imports into South Carolina, 1717-1767**

	1717- 1719	1722- 1728	1730- 1739	1752- 1753	1757- 1760	1762- 1767	Total
From Africa	86	504	7619	250	2671	907	12037
From West Indies	53†	—	292	2	16	6	369
Total Bristol imports	139	504	7911	252	2687	913	12406
Total English imports	1603†	1729	15642	378	8530	6489	34371
Bristol imports as percentage of total English imports	8.7	29.1	50.6	66.7	31.5	14.1	36.0

* Bristol vessels only brought negroes to South Carolina in certain of the years of some of the periods cited, that is, in 1724, 1758-60 and 1763-5.

† The number of negroes carried by one vessel from the West Indies is not stated.

analysis of advertisements in the *South Carolina Gazette* shows that, between 1757 and 1766, Bristol's share of slave imports into Charleston was 24 per cent, London's 16 per cent, and Liverpool's 31 per cent; while Lancaster was the chief amongst the other ports engaging in the slave trade with South Carolina.²⁷ By the early 1770s Bristol's share had fallen to under one-fifth. Overall, therefore, while Bristol had a dominant share in the supply of slaves to Virginia and South Carolina in the 1720s and 1730s and Bristol's contribution to Virginian imports remained substantial till the 1760s, in the case of South Carolina Bristol was of declining importance in the later 1750s and 1760s.

Of the sources of slaves imported into the American mainland, it is not possible to speak with precision for so many of the vessels were merely recorded as coming from 'Africa'.²⁸ But for Virginia between 1699 and 1769 the position can be summarised both for total slave imports and for imports by Bristol vessels as in Table 5. Similar information for South Carolina is contained in Table 6.

TABLE 5 *Origins of slaves imported into Virginia, 1699-1769*

<i>From</i>	<i>Total imports</i>	<i>Bristol imports</i>	<i>Bristol imports as percentage of total</i>
Africa	28098	14094	50.2
Gambia	3565	622	17.4
Guinea	7268	2667	36.7
Calabar	8830	7884	89.3
Angola	3826	2200	57.5
Senegal	287	—	—
Madagascar	1231	635	51.6
Total from Africa	53105	28102	52.9
West Indies	8251	2319	28.1
British North America	520	—	—
Elsewhere	32	2	6.3
	61908	30423	49.1

On the relative merits of the different African slaves, at least as far as South Carolina merchants are concerned, we have the opinion of Henry Laurens who declared in 1755 that 'there must

not be a Callabar amongst them. Gold Coast or Gambia's are best, next to them the Windward Coast are prefer'd to Angola's'.²⁹ And in the same year he lamented that the *Matilda* of Bristol with a cargo of nearly 200 slaves from Calabar had to undergo a long quarantine due to smallpox aboard and he feared that other vessels would get their slaves on the market first because

TABLE 6 *Origins of slaves imported into South Carolina, 1717-1767*

<i>From</i>	<i>Total imports</i>	<i>Bristol imports</i>	<i>Bristol imports as percentage of total</i>
Africa	17889	7648	42.8
Gambia	1722	331	19.2
Guinea	2704	737	27.3
Calabar	304	209	68.8
Angola	7303	3112	42.6
Senegal	90	—	—
Total from Africa	30012	12037	40.0
West Indies	4100	369	9.0
British North America	258	—	—
	34371*	12406	36.0

* Includes one from the Isle of May.

'Callabar slaves wont go down when others can be had in plenty'³⁰ since it was held that they tended to commit suicide more readily than slaves from other parts of West Africa. More generally, too, South Carolina planters appear to have had stronger ethnic prejudices about the kinds of slaves they bought than their Virginia neighbours.³¹ They seem to have preferred above all to have had slaves from Senegambia, from the Bambara and Malenké, and generally had a prejudice against short people. They would take negroes from the Gold Coast but had a marked dislike of those from the Bight of Biafra.³² By contrast, Curtin suggests, the relatively high Virginian percentage of Calabars may well be a reflection of South Carolinian prejudice, in that Biafran slaves unacceptable in Charleston were sold in the nearest convenient market.³³

BRISTOL VESSELS AND THEIR VOYAGES

Like most eighteenth-century trades, the Africa trade was seasonal, affected by weather conditions at sea and the timing of the harvests. 'The properest season to render the Guinea voyages most prosperous and safe, is to depart from Europe about the latter end of September',³⁴ wrote James Barbot; but the clearings from Bristol show that vessels from that port were not always able to observe this advice. Table 7 does, however, show that the largest number of clearances took place between August and October.

TABLE 7 *Months of clearance of Africa vessels from Bristol, 1730-1776*

<i>Jan</i>	<i>Feb</i>	<i>Mar</i>	<i>Apr</i>	<i>May</i>	<i>Jun</i>	<i>Jul</i>	<i>Aug</i>	<i>Sep</i>	<i>Oct</i>	<i>Nov</i>	<i>Dec</i>
54	42	36	42	47	56	58	87	62	63	44	62
132			145			207			169		
277						376					

It is not yet possible to analyse statistically the times of arrival of slave-vessels on the coast of West Africa or their length of stay there but the situation in the American mainland colonies can be examined. For South Carolina, Donnan once wrote that 'it can scarcely be said, after examining these records, that there was a definite season for the arrival and sale of these cargoes, since they frequently appeared as early as January and laggard captains often arrived in late November or early December'.³⁵ But an analysis of the figures does not support quite such a negative conclusion. As can be seen from Tables 8 and 9, most vessels arrived in the American colonies between April and October. Of 68 Bristol vessels, 45 (66 per cent) entered South Carolina during these seven months (and 26, or 38 per cent, between June and August) while 33 out of 36 London ships (92 per cent) arrived there in the summer months.³⁶ As Joseph Wragg noted in 1736: 'it's very rare that any slaves arrive here between the last of

October and the first February but suffer considerably by the cold; on fitting out for this place, regard should all ways be had to the time of being here to avoid the extremity of the cold and as early as may be in the spring'.³⁷ Twenty years later, on 13 October 1756, Henry Laurens wrote: 'our planters now think that the importation of slaves is nearly over for the present year';³⁸ and his letters concerning slave cargoes are concentrated in the summer months. It was during these months that the indigo harvest required additional labour and planters were anxious to increase their labour force at this time.

TABLE 8 *Arrivals of Bristol slave vessels in South Carolina, by months, 1717-1765*

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
From Africa	2	1	2	1	4	7	12	4	5	7	6	3	54
From West Indies	3	4	1	1	1	-	1	2	-	-	-	1	14
Total	5	5	3	2	5	7	13	6	5	7	6	4	68

TABLE 9 *Arrivals of Bristol slave vessels in Virginia, by months, 1718-1769*

	Not known	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
From Africa	5	-	-	1	9	22	25	23	19	15	8	-	-	127
From West Indies	-	-	-	-	4	1	3	1	1	-	-	-	-	10
Total	5	-	-	1	13	23	28	24	20	15	8	-	-	137

A similar picture emerges from the somewhat more numerous entries into Virginia. As Table 9 shows, most of the Bristol slave-vessels—95 out of 137 (69 per cent)—arrived in Virginia between May and August.

The slavers would plan to arrive in Virginia in the summer,

sell their slaves, carry out any repairs necessary and then be in time to collect the packed hogsheads of tobacco which were ready for shipment in July or August.³⁹ Such an arrangement also suited the planters for 'when negroes come in about the beginning of the summer', a contemporary stated, 'the planters are abundantly more fond of them and will give greater prices for them, because they are sure of the advantage of their labour in the year's crop, whereas negroes bought at the latter end of the year, are of little service till the next spring'.⁴⁰

When all was ready and weather conditions were favourable, the vessels cleared the American colonies and sailed with the prevailing south-westerlies filling their sails for England. Some at least of the constant traders returned to Bristol to unload their

TABLE 10 *Voyage times of Bristol vessels in the Africa trade, 1723-6, 1763-7*

	1723-6		1763-7	
	<i>Number of ships</i>	<i>Length of voyage, in months</i>	<i>Number of ships</i>	<i>Length of voyage, in months</i>
Total voyages	110	12.2	94	14.5
Jamaica	42	12.9	43	15.5
Barbados and Leeward Islands	32	11.3	33	12.9
Mainland colonies	36	12.3	10	18.4

cargo, to refit and to prepare for a further outset, while others were made ready for other trades. Though in theory it should have been possible—and most profitable—with swift dispatch to complete the triangular voyage within twelve months, this was comparatively seldom achieved. Unfavourable weather at sea and delays in port obtaining cargo or refitting caused the yearly timetable to be upset. Moreover, as Table 10 shows, the total voyage time tended to lengthen in the course of the century, due in the main to a lengthening of the time which had to be spent on the African coast. The high average figure for the mainland colonies for the second period, 1763-7, may also have been affec-

ted by the smallness of the sample. All the same, a number of the vessels in the trade were constant traders.⁴¹ An outstanding example of this is the *Greyhound*, a 100-ton ship, built in Bristol in 1706 and owned by Isaac Hobhouse & Company. From 1718 until 1736, when she was replaced by a new and larger ship of the same name, there is evidence that she was regularly employed in the slave trade to the American colonies.⁴² The *Amoretta*, a vessel of 85 tons also belonging to Isaac Hobhouse, made a number of voyages to Carolina in the 1730s and then, when the imposition of prohibitive duties destroyed this trade in the 1740s, as already mentioned, traded with Virginia, although apparently less regularly.⁴³ There were also a number of vessels which made more than one voyage although they could hardly be considered constant traders.⁴⁴ About a quarter of the vessels trading to Virginia made more than one voyage but of those going to South Carolina only about one-fifth seemed to do so. And there were the vessels which for one reason or another were employed in the trade for a single voyage.

Throughout the eighteenth century, most of the Bristol ships, like those of other British ports engaged in the slave trade, remained comparatively small. It was commonly held that such vessels were better suited to West African conditions where there was a shortage of good sheltered anchorages or river entrances were made difficult by bars. A smaller ship could also be more quickly slaved than a larger vessel. Small vessels, a contemporary averred, 'near allways get money at the worst of times'. Even so the trend was towards larger ships and the average tonnage of Bristol slave-vessels increased from 96 tons in 1710-19 to over 120 tons in the 1760s.⁴⁵ These figures for the Bristol slave fleet as a whole were reflected in the figures available for the two American mainland colonies. The average tonnage of Bristol vessels entering Virginia rose from 101.4 tons between 1727 and 1738 to 136.3 tons between 1760 and 1769, while for South Carolina the average tonnage of Bristol slavers increased from 69.0 tons for the years 1717-19 to 114.3 tons for the years 1763-1765.⁴⁶

The size of a slave-vessel's crew was determined by the numbers required to sail her and the additional men needed to deal with the human cargo on the middle passage and to defend her. In consequence slave-vessels tended to sail from Bristol and the other

English ports with larger crews than would be required for vessels of a similar tonnage and rig in other trades. Once the slaves were sold, it has been argued, a smaller crew was required on the return voyage to Bristol. In general there was a positive correlation between the length of stay of a vessel in port and the extent of the reduction of its crew. But, as Table 11 shows, there were marked differences between the colonies. Thus while about 1 in 10 of the vessels trading with Virginia left with a reduced crew which might well largely be accounted for by accident, illness or death,⁴⁷ 61 per cent of the Bristol vessels cleared from Charleston with a crew which was smaller by a more substantial proportion—17.9 per cent or almost one crew-member in five. No direct evidence is available to suggest why this marked difference should have existed between the two colonies, but it might be surmised that it was easier for crew to be paid off, or to desert and to find another vessel for the homeward voyage, possibly at a higher wage, from Charleston which was a significant entrepot, than it was from Virginia which lacked a major port at this time.

TABLE 11 *Average loss of crew by Bristol slavers, 1720-1769: percentage loss*

	Total ships	Total number leaving with reduced crew	1720-9	1730-9	1740-9	1750-9	1760-9	1720-69 overall
Virginia	86	8	0	1.4 (1)*	4.6 (6)	0	7.7 (1)	3.3
South Carolina	36	22	0	24.9 (13)	—	12.1 (4)	5.1 (5)	17.9
West Indies	116	100	—	—	27.5 (42)	34.7 (32)	23.6 (26)	28.8

* Number of vessels leaving with reduced crews in brackets.

THE RETURN VOYAGE

When the slave-vessels had unloaded their slaves, they were prepared for the return voyage to their home port. In many cases, stages had to be dismantled, to enable the holds to be used for cargo, damage to the vessels had to be repaired, and the ship had

to take on victuals, water and other stores for the homeward voyage. Since few, if any, Bristol slave-vessels appear to have cleared the American mainland colonies for England in ballast,⁴⁸ a cargo had also to be secured. And when completely ready to clear for England, departure might be delayed by unfavourable weather. The bar at the entrance to Charleston harbour also could not always be cleared easily and clearance from elsewhere on the American mainland had to be negotiated with care. All this took time. Between 1725 and 1769 the average length of stay of slavers in Virginia was 76 days and between 1718 and 1765 in South Carolina was 51.6 days.⁴⁹ Before mid-century it is generally agreed that English slavers in all branches of the trade endeavoured to secure return cargoes and certainly some continued so to do after 1750.⁵⁰

To obtain a return cargo, Bristol merchants sought the help of agents in the colonies. In the case of South Carolina this was facilitated by the fact that certain Bristol merchants who resided there for a period became partners with some of the merchants there. Among these was Samuel Brailsford, who was first in partnership with Thomas Middleton (1751-60) and then with John Chapman (1763-5) in altogether 54 cargoes of slaves before returning to Bristol.⁵¹ Before his bankruptcy in 1755, Nathaniel Wraxall was a member of the firm of Inglis, Pickering & Wraxall (1751-4)⁵² who then acquired another Bristol partner, John Lloyd, and traded first as Inglis, Lloyd & Hall (1759-64) and then as Inglis, Lloyd & Company (1765-73). Thomas Farr was in partnership with Isaac da Costa (1760-3) and then with Robert Smyth before he returned to Bristol in 1764. The Bristol merchant John Crofts traded jointly with Benjamin Dart in two ventures in 1765 while John Powell⁵³ was a member of the firm of Powell, Hopton & Company from 1771 to 1774, during which time they were concerned in 34 cargoes of slaves.⁵⁴ American merchants, if Henry Laurens is any example, were ready to find homeward cargoes for slave-vessels. In 1749 he wrote to Isaac Hobhouse of Bristol suggesting that Hobhouse should entrust his business in South Carolina to Laurens' firm. Laurens' proposal was 'to load the ship importing the slaves with such produce as to be obtain'd at the season, pay coast commission there [at Charleston—Laurens was writing from London], make good all debts, remitt according to the times of payment if freight to be

had & as much in bills of exchange as can be procur'd with cash arising from the sales, to give security in England for remitting the proceed, our factorage ten per cent'.⁵⁶ Laurens also acted for a number of other Bristol merchants including Henry Bright, Thomas Easton & Company, Joseph Daltera, Devonsheir & Reeve, Charles Gwynn, and Henry Weare & Company.⁵⁶ In addition, other Charleston merchants acted as agents for Bristol merchants. In the 1730s Joseph Wragg, Benjamin Savage and Jenys & Baker dealt with almost all the Bristol slave imports while together with Inglis, Lloyd & Hall and Austin & Laurens, already mentioned, Miles Brewton, the largest South Carolina slave merchant, handled most of the Bristol consignments of slaves after the mid-century.⁵⁷ In Virginia, Bristol merchants do not appear to have been so deeply involved in partnerships with American agents,⁵⁸ perhaps because the centralised market for slaves which existed in Charleston was not paralleled in Virginia. But a number of Bristol slave firms were also tobacco importers and though it has sometimes been held that slave-ships were not suitable for the transport of tobacco, it seems clear that these firms were nevertheless concerned to secure homeward cargoes for their vessels even if at freight rates lower than the prevailing ones for vessels engaged in the direct trade between Bristol and Virginia. Among the Virginia merchants who acted for Bristol slave-traders were George Braxton, Augustine Moore and John Tayloe, all of whom served Isaac Hobhouse on occasion.⁵⁹

The return cargo of slave-vessels usually consisted of whatever were the normal export commodities of the colonies: from Virginia, tobacco, pig iron, staves, pitch and tar; from South Carolina, rice, indigo, skins, turpentine, pitch and tar. Thus in 1723 the *Greyhound* returned from Virginia with about 144,000 lbs of tobacco and 10 tons of pig iron, while in August 1755 the *Pearl* left Charleston with 288 barrels of rice and 60 barrels of pitch on her owner's account and 30 hogsheads of skins for another Bristol merchant, which 'was as much as the master could find room for'.⁶⁰ By comparison with other vessels in these trades, which themselves were not always able to obtain a full cargo, some Bristol slavers, like the *Pearl*, carried what appears to have been a full cargo, but others returned more lightly laden. In the latter cases it is not easy to say whether this was due to the fact

that they were slavers or because freight for Bristol was generally scarce. For tobacco there was a market in Bristol, which was a tobacco-processing port. Of the Bristol vessels which cleared from Virginia between 1725 and 1769, 73 per cent brought tobacco to Bristol, and of the remainder, only 6 cleared from Virginia in ballast. Of these, two sailed for Maryland in search of a return cargo.⁶¹ From South Carolina whose main produce, rice, had a market in Europe rather than in England, it was more difficult to secure a homeward cargo. In 1733 an advertisement announcing the arrival of a Bristol slaver stated, 'for the encouragement of which Sale great Regard will be had to ready Rice, as well as ready Money'.⁶² And in February 1756 Henry Laurens reported, 'Tis very rare a freight offers with us for Bristol. That port lies inconvenient for reshipping of rice & the Bristol gentlemen have always ships enough with us to carry home as much or more of our produce than their market will take off. We have two ships of Messrs Devonsheir, Reeve & Lloyd now with us. Both will go for Portugal as there is no encouragement for them to load for Bristol'.⁶³

For a full appreciation of the slave trade of Bristol with the American mainland colonies other questions ought also to be explored. The purpose of this contribution has been to show how the interest of Bristol merchants in this branch of trade waxed and waned, to discuss some aspects of the nature of Bristol shipping employed in this trade, and to provide some information about the return voyages made by Bristol slave-vessels from the American colonies to Bristol.

APPENDIX: SOURCES OF TABLES

Table 1 is derived from Elizabeth Donnan, *Documents illustrative of the history of the slave trade to America*, 4 vols (Washington, D.C. 1930-1935, reprint New York, 1969), 4, pp. 173-234. But the 1739-47 figure for ships from Africa includes two vessels omitted in Donnan's transcription, as follows: 22 September 1746 the *Nancy* snow, John Baber master, 70 tons, 4 guns, 20 men, built at Bristol 1729, registered there 12 February 1729, owned by Samuel Jacob and Company, entered the Upper James from Guinea with 209 negroes and $\frac{1}{2}$ ton elephants teeth: 24 September 1746 the *Williamsburgh* ship, John Tate master, 100 tons, 10 guns, 16 men, built at Bristol 1735, registered there 2 October 1738, owned by John King and Company, entered the Upper James from Guinea with 360

negroes, 31 elephants teeth and 200 scriviloes: PRO CO 5/1446. It will be noted that for certain years the naval office shipping lists are incomplete, and hence, according to the surviving returns, no Bristol vessels entered Virginia 1756-59. *Tables 3-6* and *9* are based on the same sources as *Table 1*. *Table 2* is derived from the South Carolina naval office shipping lists, PRO CO 5/508-11, as is *Table 8*. *Table 7* is from PRO CO Adm 7/77-100. *Table 10* is from P. D. Richardson, 'The Bristol slave trade in the eighteenth century', unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Manchester, 1969, p. 73; and *Table 11* is from David G. Rees, 'The role of Bristol in the Atlantic slave trade', unpublished M.A. dissertation, University of Exeter, 1970, pp. 34, 84.

NOTES

- 1 Francis Jerdone to Neill Buchanan, 8 July 1710, cited by Darold D. Wax, 'Negro import duties in colonial Virginia: a study in British commercial policy and local public policy', *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 74 (1971), p. 37.
- 2 An earlier version of this paper was presented to the annual conference of the American Historical Association in December 1970. In revising it I have benefited from comments by Stanley Engerman, Stephen Fisher, George Rogers and Richard Sheridan.
- 3 In the minutes of the Virginia Council for 20 October 1691 there is a report of the arrival of the ship *Society of Bristol* in 1687 with 120 negroes: Elizabeth Donnan, *Documents illustrative of the history of the slave trade to America*, 4 vols (Washington, D.C., 1935, reprinted New York, 1969) (hereafter Donnan), 4, pp. 63-5. In 1690 the Royal African Company granted a licence for a ship fitting out from Bristol, Kenneth G. Davies, *The Royal African Company* (1957), p. 126.
- 4 Between Michaelmas 1709 and Michaelmas 1710 the separate traders dispatched 24 ships from London, 20 from Bristol, 2 from Liverpool, 2 from Jamaica and 2 from Barbados; and in the same period the Royal African Company sent out 3 ships from England and 2 from the Plantations: *Calendar of State Papers Colonial, 1710-11* (1924), no. 554.
- 5 The figures were: 1731, Bristol 52 ships, London 25, Liverpool 13; and 1732, Bristol 45 ships, London 25, Liverpool 19: Public Record Office (PRO) Adm 7/77-8.
- 6 Figures derived from Donnan, 4, pp. 131-2, 175-87.
- 7 Prohibitive duties were in operation between 1740 and 1744, April 1746 and 1749 and 31 December 1766 and 1 January 1769. See Elizabeth Donnan, 'The slave trade into South Carolina before the Revolution', *American Historical Review*, 33 (1927-8), pp. 804-28; W. Robert Higgins, 'The geographical origins of negro slaves in colonial South Carolina', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 70 (1971), pp. 34-47.
- 8 Donnan, 4, pp. 207, 210, 214.
- 9 I owe this reference to Bryan Little. The previous month the *South Carolina Gazette* had reported the arrival of the *Katherine* with 300 slaves from Angola which could not be landed: Donnan, 4, p. 470.
- 10 Little information is available concerning the slave trade with North Carolina. Lacking good harbours, most of its trade was carried out overland through either South Carolina or Virginia. Information, too,

- is lacking for Delaware, and the details presented in Darold D. Wax, 'Negro imports into Pennsylvania, 1720-1766', *Pennsylvania History*, 32 (1965), pp. 254-88, while confirming that imports were small, do not allow precise calculations of imports to be made or enable the importing vessels to be identified.
- 11 Donnan, 4, p. 27. Earlier individual Bristol slavers such as the *Mediterranean* (1725-6), the *Berkeley* (1733-4) and the *George* (1740-1) may have traded with the colony: PRO E 190/1196/1, 1199/1, 1210/1, 1211/3, 1214/3, cited in P. David Richardson, 'The Bristol slave trade in the eighteenth century', unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Manchester, 1969, p. 149.
 - 12 But see also Donnan, 4, p. 43, for a letter of 10 July 1763 from Thomas Ringgold to Samuel Galloway which suggests that the Bristol merchants Devonshire & Reeve may have been sending cargoes of slaves to Maryland.
 - 13 Donnan, 4, p. 48. On the number of slaves carried, see *ibid.*, 4, pp. 39-40, which reports the arrival of the *Alexander* with 'the loss of so great a part of her slaves' that only 105 were still living and of these, 11 were in such poor condition that 6 died before 17 September 1761.
 - 14 *Ibid.*, 4, p. 35. The *Diamond* had obtained a Mediterranean pass for a voyage to Africa and America on 12 October 1759: PRO Adm 7/90.
 - 15 Donnan, 4, pp. 616, 618.
 - 16 *Ibid.*, 4, pp. 624-5.
 - 17 *Ibid.*, 2, pp. 464, 481, 485, 498, 502.
 - 18 In December 1701 a cargo of 67 slaves was brought to Virginia by a Bristol vessel, the *Expedition*, by way of Barbados: *ibid.*, 4, p. 172.
 - 19 Between 1725 and 1769, 89.5 per cent of the slaves imported into Virginia came directly from Africa: Peter Waite, 'The English and English-colonial trade in slaves to Virginia, 1698-1769', unpublished M.A. dissertation, University of Exeter, 1973, pp. 56-7. For South Carolina, it has been estimated that 86 per cent of slave imports came from Africa: Higgins, 'Geographical origins', *op. cit.*, pp. 40-5.
 - 20 This includes two Bristol vessels carrying 569 slaves from Guinea to Virginia in 1746 listed in PRO CO 5/1446 but omitted from the printed list in Donnan, 4, pp. 188-234 (see above, p. 54). Altogether 18 vessels which brought in 1,874 slaves are omitted from the list printed in Donnan. These omissions affect the calculations in Herbert S. Klein, 'Slaves and shipping in eighteenth-century Virginia', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 5 (1975), pp. 383-412.
 - 21 *Ibid.*, p. 387. While the average number of slaves carried by all the vessels from the West Indies was 12.0, Bristol vessels carried an average of 128.9 slaves. Bristol vessels from the West Indies (which had an average tonnage of 91 tons compared with the overall average of 51 tons) carried 1.4 slaves per ton compared with the overall average of 0.2 slaves per ton.
 - 22 Bristol Central Library, Jefferies MSS. XVI, 3.
 - 23 See Philip D. Curtin, *The Atlantic slave trade: a census* (Madison, 1969), p. 145.
 - 24 PRO CO 5/1441-50.
 - 25 Donnan, 4, pp. 176, 178; Higgins, 'Geographical origins', *op. cit.*, p. 45, Table IV.
 - 26 See Robert P. Thompson, 'The tobacco export of the Upper James

- River naval district, 1773-75', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, 18 (1961), pp. 393-407; Richardson, 'Bristol slave trade', *op. cit.*, pp. 147-8. Thus between 1718 and 1727 over 80 per cent of Bristol's imports of slaves entered through York River and none through the Upper James; by 1748-52 over 70 per cent entered through the Upper James and under 30 per cent by the York River.
- 27 See Richardson, 'Bristol slave trade', *op. cit.*, pp. 145-6.
- 28 For an overall picture of the places of origin of slaves imported into the American mainland colonies, see Curtin, *Atlantic slave trade*, *op. cit.*, pp. 154-8.
- 29 Philip M. Hamer and George C. Rogers (eds.), *The papers of Henry Laurens* (Columbia, South Carolina, 1968-), 1, p. 295.
- 30 *Ibid.*, 1, p. 252. The cargo of 300 Calabars brought by the Bristol slaver *Africa* to Charleston in 1756 proved difficult to sell: Donnan, 4, p. 349, note 2.
- 31 *Ibid.*, 4, p. 234, note 66, and Curtin, *Atlantic slave trade*, *op. cit.*, pp. 156-8.
- 32 Donnan, 'Slave trade into South Carolina', *op. cit.*, pp. 816-17; Curtin, *Atlantic slave trade*, *op. cit.*, pp. 157-8. There seems little substance in the suggestion that 'it could be that the "separate traders" found easier access at Angola': Peter H. Wood, '“More like a negro country”: demographic patterns in colonial South Carolina, 1700-1740', in Stanley L. Engerman and Eugene D. Genovese (eds.), *Race and slavery in the western hemisphere: quantitative studies* (Princeton, 1975), p. 151. Nor does the available Bristol evidence for the period Wood discusses support his statement that 'certain larger vessels suited to the longer voyage sailed more directly to the Angolan region for their cargo' (p. 157). Of 7 voyages, 2 were made by a vessel of 50 tons, 2 by a vessel of 120 tons and 1 each by vessels of 80, 100 and 120 tons: PRO CO 4/510. Nor, since the majority of Bristol vessels sailed directly from West Africa to South Carolina, does the South Carolina situation 'merely represent an acceptance of those nationalities still available after the West Indian planters had exerted their choices' (pp. 151-2).
- 33 Curtin, *Atlantic slave trade*, *op. cit.*, pp. 157-8. But it should be noted that some evidence from Maryland suggests that the slaves 'from the Bite is of least Esteem with us of any that is imported, Gambia the best and generally comes in best helth as the Passage is quick from thence to this place': Thomas Ringgold and Samuel Galloway to Fowler, Easton & Company, 17 September 1761, in Donnan, 4, p. 40.
- 34 From 'An abstract of a voyage to Congo River or the Zair and to Cabinde in the year 1700' in Donnan, 1, p. 459.
- 35 Donnan, 'Slave trade into South Carolina', *op. cit.*, p. 808, note 17.
- 36 PRO CO 5/508-11.
- 37 Postscript dated 1 July to letter of 30 June 1736 from Joseph Wragg to Isaac Hobhouse, Jefferies MSS, XVI, 148, Bristol Central Library.
- 38 Hamer and Rogers (eds.), *Henry Laurens*, *op. cit.*, 2, p. 337.
- 39 Samuel M. Rosenblatt, 'The house of John Norton and Sons: a study of the consignment method of marketing tobacco from Virginia to England', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Rutgers University, 1960, p. 36.
- 40 PRO CO 5/1316, 441, p. 133.
- 41 According to the records so far examined, 45 out of 409 vessels made five or more voyages in the slave trade with the American mainland

- colonies: figures derived from PRO Adm 7/77-100; CO 5/508-11, 1441-50; Donnan, 4.
- 42 Donnan, 4, pp. 176-7, 183-5, 279; and naval office shipping lists.
- 43 Donnan, 4, pp. 278-80, 296; and naval office shipping lists.
- 44 In addition to the 45 vessels mentioned above (note 41), 136 out of the total of 409 British vessels in the slave trade between 1730 and 1776 made more than one voyage in the trade.
- 45 David G. Rees, 'The role of Bristol in the Atlantic slave trade', unpublished M.A. dissertation, University of Exeter, 1970, p. 76.
- 46 Derived for Virginia from Donnan, 4, pp. 173-234, and for South Carolina from PRO CO 5/508-11.
- 47 It should be noted that these are net figures and may well understate the loss of crew by desertion. Arthur P. Middleton, *Tobacco coast: a maritime history of Chesapeake Bay in the colonial era* (Newport News, 1953), pp. 271-5, suggests that despite the laws passed to limit it, desertion was rife throughout the colonial period in Virginia. He argues that vessels which lost crew in the colony recruited replacements in Virginia before sailing.
- 48 See Walter E. Minchinton, 'The triangular trade revisited' in Henry A. Gemery and Jan S. Hogendorn, *The Atlantic slave trade* (Princeton, forthcoming).
- 49 PRO CO 5/1441-50, 508-11. But a Bristol vessel trading directly between Bristol and South Carolina spent an average of 28 days per voyage in Charleston during five voyages in the 1760s: Walter E. Minchinton, 'Richard Champion, Nicholas Pocock and the Carolina trade: a note', *South Carolina Historical Magazine*, 70 (1969), pp. 97-103.
- 50 Minchinton, 'Triangular trade', *op. cit.*; Richard Sheridan, 'The commercial and financial organisation of the British slave trade, 1750-1807', *Economic History Review*, 11 (1958), pp. 249-63.
- 51 Samuel Brailsford is the only Bristol merchant listed as a Carolina merchant in *Sketchley's Bristol Directory of 1775* (Bath, reprinted 1971).
- 52 For his bankruptcy, where his partners are named as Messrs Inglis and Pickering, see 'Cases submitted to counsel', f. 121 (B 6590, Bristol Central Library). He returned to business and is listed as an American merchant in *Sketchley's Directory* in 1775.
- 53 Listed as a Guinea merchant in 1775 (*Sketchley's Directory*).
- 54 The details of the partnerships are taken from W. Robert Higgins, 'Charles Town merchants and factors dealing in the external negro trade, 1735-1775', *South Carolina Historical Magazine*, 65 (1964), pp. 205-17. See also Wesley R. Savadge, 'The west country and the American mainland colonies, 1763-1783, with special reference to the merchants of Bristol', unpublished B.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford, 1952; Walter E. Minchinton, *The trade of Bristol in the eighteenth century* (Bristol Record Society, 20, 1957).
- 55 Hamer and Rogers (eds.), *Henry Laurens, op. cit.*, 1, 227.
- 56 *Ibid.*, *passim*.
- 57 Richardson, 'Bristol slave trade', *op. cit.*, p. 270.
- 58 Joseph Farrel, a partner in the Bristol firm of Farrel & Jones, lived in Virginia for a period but does not appear to have been involved in the slave trade: Minchinton, *Trade of Bristol, op. cit.*, pp. xviii, 170.
- 59 On this point, see Walter E. Minchinton (ed.), 'The Virginia letters of

Isaac Hobhouse, merchant of Bristol', *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 66 (1958), pp. 278-301.

60 PRO E 190/1192/3: Hamer and Rogers (eds.), *Henry Laurens, op. cit.*, 1, p. 301.

61 Minchinton, 'Triangular trade', *op. cit.*

62 Donnan, 4, p. 278, note 2.

63 Hamer and Rogers (eds), *Henry Laurens, op. cit.*, 2, p. 99.

Profits in the Liverpool slave trade: the accounts of William Davenport, 1757-1784

DAVID RICHARDSON

The last few years have witnessed a many-sided and generally persuasive assault on the traditional belief that the eighteenth-century slave trade was highly profitable. It is now perhaps coming to be widely agreed that average profits in the trade were relatively modest and indeed that profit-making sometimes proved very difficult.¹ This outcome seems hardly surprising in view of the uncertain and very competitive character of the business in the eighteenth century; even Eric Williams, perhaps the last of the traditional school of thought, concluded that these were very significant features of the trade, though he failed to follow up their implications for profit margins.²

It is tempting to envisage recent work as the decisive and concluding chapter to the long debate about profits in the slave trade. But it should be recognised that this debate was largely conducted in terms of 'average' profits. Little attention was paid to fluctuations in profit margins, even though these were most relevant to eighteenth-century merchants making decisions about investing in the trade. However recent demonstration that average profits were quite modest would seem to imply that fluctuations and variations in profit margins ought to be looked at more carefully, particularly as it is clear that the trade itself underwent very significant structural changes during the course of the eighteenth century. That the study of these other aspects of profits can be both interesting and instructive is well illustrated by the work of Jean Meyer on the French slave trade in the second half of the eighteenth century.³ A detailed examination of the surviving papers of some slave merchants of Nantes in this period has

enabled Meyer to show that their profit margins were probably being eroded at this time, a fact that he attributes largely to their failure to secure quick remittance of the proceeds of slave sales in the West Indies.

Detailed analytical studies of this sort have not been attempted for the English trade, largely because of the apparent scarcity of surviving merchant papers for this period. It is true that in 1957 K. G. Davies published an important study of the Royal African Company, and that there have also been quite a large number of studies of eighteenth-century slave-merchants' papers and accounts.⁴ The financial affairs of the Royal African Company, however, were greatly influenced by problems such as the obligation to maintain forts in West Africa which hardly affected private traders after 1698. And in any case Davies only took the Company's history to 1712; the growth of private trading, especially from Liverpool, occurred very largely after this date. Almost without exception the studies based on surviving private traders' accounts for the eighteenth century cover, unfortunately, only a very few voyages each—usually no more than two or three—and so, whilst being informative, have limited general significance.

Yet there does exist at least one substantial and quite well-known set of eighteenth-century accounts and papers which has so far escaped detailed investigation. These are the accounts of William Davenport, a Liverpool merchant, for the second half of the eighteenth century. In all, Davenport's accounts provide a detailed financial record of over seventy voyages in which he was involved from 1757 to 1784, making them easily the largest single collection of accounts of an eighteenth-century English slave-merchant so far discovered.⁵ For this reason alone, they deserve much more consideration than they have received to date.

DAVENPORT'S CAREER AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

William Davenport, the third son of Davies Davenport and Penelope Ward, was born in London in October 1725.⁶ A younger son of a gentry family, William followed, not unusually, a career in commerce. Nothing is known of his very early life but in 1741 he was apprenticed for the sum of £120 to William Whaley, a Liverpool merchant and slave-trader.⁷ Lack of evi-

dence prevents us from saying how this came about, but the fact that Davenport's family had Cheshire connections was perhaps important. Davenport's association with Whaley was, however, significant, for it was in partnership with Whaley that William Davenport first became involved in Liverpool overseas trade and especially in the slave trade.⁸ In September 1749 William became a freeman of Liverpool by virtue of his apprenticeship to Whaley, the Freeman's Register describing Davenport as a grocer, 'now merchant'.⁹

Davenport's active business life in Liverpool began in the late 1740s and lasted until about 1790. During some of this time he was joined in Liverpool by two of his brothers, Christopher and Richard, who pursued their own separate business interests as well as sharing in some of William's slaving ventures.¹⁰ But William was undoubtedly the most important of the three brothers involved in Liverpool commerce. His career advanced steadily during the 1750s and early 1760s, and then very rapidly between 1763 and 1776.¹¹ The later years saw a substantial growth in Liverpool's trade in general and were, without doubt, the prime years of Davenport's career. At that time he did business from Drury Lane in his own capacity and was also partner in the firm of William Davenport and Company, wine merchants of Harrington Street.¹² The opening of the War of American Independence in 1776, however, acted as a check to this apparently flourishing business career. Davenport continued to trade throughout the war but at a noticeably lower level than previously. Moreover his commercial activities continued to decline after the war ended in 1783. Shortly after this date he appears to have wound up most of his commercial and financial affairs. Any really noteworthy connection with shipowning and commerce ended during the mid-1780s, even though he still had a business address at Mathew Street in 1790 and was part-owner of the ship *Perserverance* until 1792.¹³ But he was not mentioned in the Liverpool directory of 1794. William Davenport died in August 1797, aged almost 73.¹⁴

It seems that during an active career of forty years or so Davenport concentrated wholeheartedly upon trade and finance. Even though his business activities brought him into close contact with some of Liverpool's leading families, notably the Earles, it seems that throughout his life he cut himself off from local poli-

tical life. He never held any sort of political office in the town, nor surprisingly for one so involved in the slave trade did he associate with his fellow merchants in lobbying on behalf of the trade. Not only did he refrain from joining the Liverpool section of the Company of Merchants Trading to Africa, formed in 1750, but he did not sign any of the numerous petitions presented by slave-traders in his lifetime.¹⁵ Davenport's career was, therefore, devoted almost exclusively to business. The full range of these business activities is, however, uncertain. It is well known that eighteenth-century outpost merchants often dabbled in several lines of trade at any one time, and in some respects William Davenport was no exception. He does not seem to have owned ships trading directly with the American plantations, but did take a share in a privateer during the War of American Independence.¹⁶ At other times he was involved with the Earles in Mediterranean ventures, particularly to Leghorn and Venice.¹⁷ This particular line of trade may have been connected with his interest in a wine firm, mentioned earlier, as well as with a bead business in which he was involved in the late 1760s and probably at other times also. According to a detailed bead book which has survived in the Davenport papers, Davenport sold beads to the value of approximately £39,000 from July 1766 to July 1770.¹⁸ In the eighteenth century Venice was a noted supply centre for beads,¹⁹ particularly for English slave-traders, and almost all of the bead sales recorded in Davenport's bead book were to African-bound vessels. Through this bead business, therefore, Davenport's involvement in Mediterranean ventures may have been connected with his slave trade activities.

Although the evidence concerning Davenport's commercial activities other than slave-trading is on the whole comparatively slight, it does suggest that slave-trading was central to his affairs. Indeed the most striking feature of Davenport's whole career was the extent to which he concentrated his energy and his capital on this trade. By all accounts he was a true specialist in the business. At the moment it is difficult to say how typical Davenport's career was in this respect, for detailed reconstruction of career profiles of other slave-traders has unfortunately attracted little attention from historians. But it does seem that slave-traders of both Liverpool and Bristol often participated in a substantial way in direct trading with the American plantations as well as

in other trades.²⁰ The pattern of Davenport's career, therefore, may well have been rather unusual.

During a slave-trading career of nearly forty years, William Davenport invested in about 160 slaving voyages which employed some seventy vessels.²¹ Most of these vessels made only one or two voyages whilst Davenport was part-owner, but some, such as the *Chesterfield* in the 1750s, the *Dalrymple* in the 1760s and the *King of Prussia* in the 1770s, made five or more voyages under his control. Comprehensive accounts have survived for seventy-four voyages in which he invested during the period 1757 to 1784. Total recorded investment in these seventy-four voyages was just under £324,000, of which William Davenport's contribution was slightly under £60,000.²² Three of his brothers—Christopher, Richard and Thomas—contributed a further £25,000. Members of the Davenport family, therefore, provided over one-quarter of the total investments in the slaving voyages covered by the Davenport accounts; the rest came from a large and diverse group of Liverpool merchants and tradesmen. The Davenports' recorded investments were by no means evenly distributed throughout the twenty-eight years covered by the accounts; nearly three-quarters of William's investment was concentrated in the years 1768 to 1776 inclusive. If, however, the surviving accounts do not reflect with total accuracy the overall spread of William's involvement in slave-trading, neglecting in particular his interest in the trade in the 1750s, they do give us a good coverage of his slave-trading activities at their peak and in their years of decline.

Using these data of recorded investments it is possible to estimate crudely William Davenport's total investments in slave-trading ventures. Assuming that he invested on average £750 to £800 per voyage,²³ his investment in some 160 voyages from 1748 to the mid-1780s must have been between £120,000 and £130,000; this represented an average of some £3,500 per year during the whole course of his slave-trading career. At the height of his career in the late 1760s and early 1770s, however, it seems likely that his annual investment in the trade was nearly double this overall average, or about £7,000. Given the risky character of the trade this was a substantial sum for any outport merchant to commit to one trade, even though the investments were spread over several simultaneous voyages. Yet these sums were only a small fraction of Liverpool's total investment in slave-trading at

this time. Between 1748 and 1784 an average of sixty vessels per year cleared Liverpool for Africa for slaves.²⁴ Assuming an average investment per voyage of £4,400—the average of the recorded Davenport voyages—Liverpool annually invested about £264,000 in the slave trade from 1748 to 1784. Davenport contributed perhaps £3,500 of this, or 1.3 per cent. Even at his peak, Davenport's contribution to Liverpool's investment in slave-trading was no more than 2 per cent. Clearly, the Liverpool slave trade attracted funds from a very large number of merchants and tradesmen in the mid-eighteenth century.

But these rather crude calculations may well underestimate William Davenport's contribution to the development of Liverpool's slave trade in the third quarter of the eighteenth century. Not only is it doubtful if many Liverpool merchants exceeded Davenport's commitment to the trade in financial terms, especially from 1763 to 1776, but Davenport was also one of the major entrepreneurs of the Liverpool slave-trading community at this time. He was instrumental in opening up and developing new sources of slave supply on the West Africa coast at a time when international competition for slaves was very intense. In addition he was manager in many of the slaving ventures with which he was concerned. Both of these aspects of his career as a slave-trader warrant further discussion.

It is possible to trace the intended African destination of most of the vessels in which Davenport was involved; trading destinations have been traced for 144 of the 160 or so voyages in which he invested.²⁵ Whilst it is clear that at one time or another Davenport traded with most commercial centres on the West African coast, the bulk of his slave-trading was done at Gambia, Old Calabar and the Cameroons. Of the voyages traced so far, eleven were bound for Gambia, forty-three for the Cameroons, and fifty-five for Old Calabar. Thus at least two-thirds of all Davenport's ventures were destined for either the Cameroons or Old Calabar.

Gambia, one of the oldest centres of English slave-trading, only seems to have attracted Davenport's vessels in any significant numbers during the early years of his career. By the mid-1750s Davenport was already expressing doubts about the continuing viability of this trade; thus he wrote in 1755 that '[We] are afraid they will overdo that river there being no less than 17

ships for that place'.²⁶ How he arrived at this figure is difficult to say for the number of vessels clearing Liverpool for Gambia in 1755 and 1756 combined numbered well below seventeen.²⁷ But his doubts were soon translated into action, for in the late 1750s there was a noticeable decline in interest shown by Davenport in the Gambia trade.

The decline of Davenport's trade with Gambia coincided with an expansion of his trade with Old Calabar. English slave-trading on a large scale at Old Calabar dated from the 1720s at least, and by 1750 it had become one of the major centres supplying slaves for English vessels on the West African coast.²⁸ From the outset of his career Davenport traded to Old Calabar, although why this was so is unknown; the influence of William Whaley, his former master, may have been of some significance. Unlike the Gambia trade, Davenport's interest in the Old Calabar trade was permanent and substantial. In time this trade engaged some of the largest vessels with which he was concerned, such as the *Chesterfield*, the *Dobson* and the *Hector*.

But more significant in some respects than the scale of Davenport's expanding trade with Old Calabar was the development of his trade with the Cameroons, for English trade on any scale with this place only began in the 1750s.²⁹ Vessels owned by Davenport helped to pioneer this trade and then to establish it on a firm footing. Amongst the earliest English ships to trade at the Cameroons in the 1750s was a Davenport vessel, the *Raccoon*; it left Liverpool in October 1756, intending to purchase 70 slaves.³⁰ During the following twenty years or so Liverpool ships regularly traded for slaves at the Cameroons and Davenport vessels figured prominently amongst them. Altogether some sixty-three slave ships left Liverpool for the Cameroons between November 1755 and December 1776, and William Davenport was connected with at least thirty-five of them.³¹ It would seem, therefore, that William Davenport did as much as any other Liverpool merchant to foster permanent English trading relationships with the Cameroons.

Documenting the scale of Davenport's involvement in the Cameroons is a relatively straightforward matter; explaining it is much more difficult. It should be realised at the outset that a totally satisfying explanation of Davenport's decision to try the Cameroons trade is never likely to be forthcoming, but his evident

concern about the Gambia trade in the mid-1750s, the timing of his entry into the Cameroons trade, and his interest in the bead business may provide us with some answers. As was noted earlier, Davenport was involved in a substantial way in the bead trade in the late 1760s, and it is possible that he was connected with the trade in the 1750s, although there is no direct evidence of this. Beads were an important trade good in the Gambia River in the mid-eighteenth century,³² and it is conceivable that Davenport's bead business and his early interest in the Gambia trade were related. If this was so, his growing concern about this branch of slave-trading in the mid-1750s may well have induced Davenport to try the Cameroons trade in which, significantly, beads were also a crucial item of trade. Davenport's accounts suggest that beads comprised between a quarter and a half of the value of cargoes shipped from Liverpool to the Cameroons.³³ Thus beads may well be a vital clue in explaining the growth of Davenport's trading connection with the last place.

Davenport's significance within the Liverpool slave-trading community of his day was not confined solely to his role in helping to pioneer the Cameroons trade. This is not the place to try to analyse in detail the character of the slave-trading community of eighteenth-century Liverpool. But it is well known that slaving voyages from the English outports were usually financed by partnerships. Our knowledge of the internal workings of such partnerships is, however, very incomplete. Historians have traditionally concentrated their attention upon the size and often short-lived duration of these partnerships, which in turn were thought to reflect the great uncertainties of the trade.³⁴ The Davenport accounts tend to endorse traditional views of these aspects of slave-trading partnerships. Yet rarely have historians asked how these often quite large partnerships actually went about the task of organising and managing slaving ventures. Was a venture managed, for instance, by the group of partners collectively, or by a sub-group, or by a single partner? On the whole it would seem that within each partnership the general management of its affairs normally devolved upon one of the partners, who was variously referred to as the 'ship's husband', 'purser' or 'agent'. And it was by the name of this particular partner that the 'firm' was usually known. Upon him fell the responsibility for supervising the outfit of the ship, assorting outward-bound cargoes,

corresponding with the master at sea and with commission houses in the New World, and general keeping of accounts. From the point of view of the 'sleeping partners' in slaving ventures the benefits of this system of management seem to have been obvious: it allowed those with funds on their hands but with little knowledge of the business of slave-trading to put their capital into the trade at less risk than if they had tried to handle voyages themselves. Moreover, given the quite substantial outlay of capital involved in each slaving venture, rapid expansion of the trade depended to some extent upon the attraction into it of 'outside' sources of capital. However the benefits that agents themselves derived from the system are rather obscure. They certainly received no special privileges or commissions. We must assume, therefore, that the advantage of this method of management to the agent lay in his ability to attract, by virtue of his reputation, 'sleeping partners' into proposed slaving ventures, thereby enabling him to spread his risks.

Whatever the rationale behind the system, it seems clear that much of the organisation of the Liverpool slave trade revolved around the agent. Unfortunately it is impossible to trace agents of all eighteenth-century Liverpool slaving voyages but it so happens that agents can be traced for some 533 voyages undertaken in the years 1766 to 1774, a period when Davenport's interest in the trade was at its height.³⁵ From this evidence a distinct pattern of management of slaving ventures at Liverpool emerges at this time. Some 30 per cent (or 146) of these voyages were managed by sixty-three men, most of whom took responsibility for only one or two ventures. By contrast, the remaining 70 per cent (or 387) were managed by only twenty merchants, each of whom handled at least ten voyages. Thus a management elite existed in the Liverpool slave trade in the late 1760s and early 1770s, and probably at other times. Furthermore, in this specific period, Davenport clearly belonged to this elite, for he was agent for twenty-seven of the voyages contained in the sample, a figure exceeded by only one other agent.

Thus William Davenport's importance as a slave trader was greater than is suggested by his small share in Liverpool's total investment in the slave trade in the third quarter of the eighteenth century. A substantial investor in the trade in his own right, he was also an entrepreneur in the real sense of the term, single-

mindedly pursuing business, actively managing ventures and above all helping to pioneer a new branch of slave-trading. For these reasons the surviving accounts of Davenport's ventures are of particular value to students of the economics of the eighteenth-century English slave trade.

THE ACCOUNTS: PROBLEMS OF INTERPRETATION

The trading accounts of William Davenport are the largest set of accounts of an eighteenth-century outport slave merchant discovered to date. Sufficiently detailed accounts of the outlays, returns and running costs have survived to allow one to calculate the profitability of seventy-four voyages with which Davenport was concerned. The first voyage for which there are detailed accounts was in 1757, the last in 1784; the rest are heavily concentrated in the late 1760s and early 1770s. Thirty-seven of these voyages were made to Old Calabar, twenty-six to the Cameroons, and the remaining eleven were divided amongst several other trading centres such as Gambia, Benin and Bonny.

The basic data required for calculating profits from these voyages are set out in the appendix. The data presented there are arranged by voyages according to the intended place of trade on the West African coast, and comprise the name of the vessel, its year of departure from Liverpool, total outlays and total net returns or 'insets'. It will be observed that for each voyage there are 'original' and 'adjusted' totals for both outlays and insets. This is because close examination of the original accounts revealed that they are incomplete in some respects. It became necessary, therefore, to make some adjustments to the original accounts. What follows is a brief outline of the difficulties presented by the original accounts and the methods of adjustment adopted.

Outlays in slaving voyages comprised the cost of the cargo for Africa, plus the costs of the ship and its fitting out and insurance. It was usual for outport merchants in the eighteenth century to own the ships they employed in slaving ventures. With regard to outlays there are three problems with the Davenport accounts. First, the cost or value of the ship is not always given, nor is its written-down or residual value at the end of the voyage always recorded. Second, insurance premiums are rarely included in the outlays. And, third, the pricing of goods and outfitting costs was

not uniform: some goods and services were bought on credit (that is, on 'tradesmen's notes'), while others were paid for in cash. Cash and credit prices were thus freely inter-mixed.

Evidence from the Davenport papers and elsewhere allows us to make some adjustments for such problems. The cost or value of the ship at the outset of the voyage is given in over half of the ventures listed in the appendix, and in nearly one-third the residual value of the ship at the end of the voyage is also provided. Additional information relating to ships' values can be gleaned from the evidence given by various prominent Liverpool slave-traders, such as John Tarleton, Samuel Green and Robert Norris, to several committees investigating the slave trade about 1790.³⁶ Eighteenth-century valuations of ships must, of course, be treated with caution, as it is not clear how they were ascertained. Nevertheless there is general agreement among these various sources upon the share of ship and outfitting costs in total outlays. The ship and its outfit comprised about one-third of total outlays; the ship alone normally constituted approximately one-third of the combined ship and outfit costs.³⁷ Where the value of the outward-bound vessel is omitted in the Davenport accounts, therefore, outfitting costs have been raised by 50 per cent to allow for the value of the ship.³⁸

With regard to the residual value of the ship at the conclusion of the voyage our sources are more problematical, for they confront us with seemingly impossible results. At the very least they appear to imply that no depreciation actually took place! Thus, for instance, the computations made by John Tarleton in 1788 suggest that the ship was worth 67 per cent more at the end of the voyage than at the beginning, while the Davenport accounts suggest that on average the value of the ship was more or less the same at the start and end of the voyage. It is impossible to say how Tarleton could have arrived at his figure, but the conclusion suggested by the Davenport accounts may not be as strange as it appears at first glance. The root of the problem seems to lie in eighteenth-century methods of accounting. Ships sent out on slaving voyages usually had extra fittings installed, such as long boats, platforms, bulkheads and, by the late 1770s copper sheathing, and some of these undoubtedly enhanced the value of the ship. However, the costs of such items were generally included not in the value of the ship at the start of the voyage but in

outfitting charges. Consequently the latter incorporated some substantial expenditures on capital account. It seems not too unreasonable, therefore, to follow the Davenport accounts and assume that, in those instances where it was omitted, the written-down value of the ship was one-third of the combined outlay charges on the ship and its outfitting.

Insurance charges were also frequently omitted from the original Davenport accounts, mainly because it appears to have been left to each individual shareholder in ventures to make his own insurance arrangements. There is little doubt, given the unpredictable and risky character of the trade, that mid-eighteenth century slave-traders regularly insured their ventures. Methods of insuring varied, but as payments for slaves came to be made largely in post-dated bills of exchange, traders tended to insure their shares in total initial outlays to Africa and America only; insurance on the ship on the return run and the small quantities of produce usually brought home from America was undertaken separately at a later date.³⁹ Adjustments for insurance have been made according to this procedure. In Davenport's time rates of insurance from Liverpool to Africa and America were 7.5 per cent in peacetime; the rate from America to Liverpool was 2 per cent. In wartime these rates rose sharply, and a doubling of peacetime rates has been assumed. The inclusion of insurance premiums in outlays means, of course, that inset accounts must also be adjusted when ships and their cargoes were lost. Losses were generally not totally recoverable, however, as eighteenth-century marine insurance policies invariably included an abatement in case of loss.⁴⁰ In the early eighteenth century this may have been as high as 10 or 15 per cent, but by mid-century was usually under 5 per cent. In making adjustments for losses in the Davenport accounts, therefore, it has been assumed that shareholders recovered 95 per cent of their losses.

The use of credit in making payment for some of the cargo and outfitting expenses is the final major difficulty with the Davenport outlay accounts. To achieve some uniformity in the pricing of goods and services received, it is necessary to convert credit prices into their cash or present values. This requires detailed knowledge of the value of goods obtained on credit, the length of the credit given by suppliers of goods, and the normal rate of discount. Davenport's accounts offer evidence of both

goods bought on credit and rates of discount for cash.⁴¹ The proportion of goods obtained on credit varied widely from one voyage to another, but on average was slightly less than half of the total outlays. Discounts for cash also varied greatly, ranging from about 5 to 20 per cent or more. Thus it is difficult to suggest with absolute confidence an average discount for cash as many factors influenced this. A rate of 5 per cent per annum in peace and war has, however, been used in my calculations. For evidence of the length of credit offered by tradesmen we must look beyond the Davenport papers.⁴² The length of credit on offer differed from one supplier to another and also fluctuated over time. But it would appear that during the second half of the eighteenth century Bristol and Liverpool slave-traders normally expected and usually succeeded in obtaining twelve months' credit, particularly from suppliers of some of the major categories of trade goods such as East India and Manchester textiles, guns and liquor. Consequently, for purposes of converting credit into cash values it has been assumed that the average term of credit was one year.⁴³

Turning from outlays to returns, the major items on the inset accounts were payments for slaves, African produce such as ivory, freight earnings from the carriage of produce from the New World, and the residual value of the ship. The problem of residual values has been dealt with already, but two other problems are evident. First, earnings other than from sales of slaves are included among the returns; second, payments for slaves were made very largely in post-dated bills of exchange.

Because earnings from activities other than slave-trading are included, Davenport's accounts are technically more than a record of his slaving ventures. How one deals with this depends to some extent on one's conception of the slave trade as a business enterprise. From a purely practical point of view unscrambling slaving transactions from other transactions is a very complex task, affecting not only revenues but also outlays and operating costs. Intricate and complicated adjustments of this sort may be thought unnecessary, however, if one looks at the whole trade from the perspective of the slave-trader. Slave-trading was an uncertain and risky business, and to succeed in it merchants and their agents had to be flexible and possess an eye for favourable opportunities.⁴⁴ The possibility of additional or even alternative

sources of earnings to slaves, particularly in the West African sphere of operations, was generally welcomed by slave-traders. And hence, to divorce earnings from slaves from other sources of income makes little sense of eighteenth-century slave-trading as a business enterprise. For this reason, no attempt has been made to exclude non-slave earnings from the data presented in the appendix.

For the seventy-four voyages listed in the appendix more or less complete accounts have survived regarding remittances on sales of slaves in the New World. In six cases no remittances reached Liverpool as the ships concerned were lost before reaching the New World. Remittances for the remaining sixty-eight voyages totalled about £329,000. Approximately 90 per cent of this sum comprised post-dated bills of exchange; the rest was made up of produce or specie. Remitting the proceeds of slave sales in bills was by no means unusual in the second half of the eighteenth century, particularly when slaves were sold in the West Indies as the great majority of Davenport's were.⁴⁵ In most instances the set of bills remitted was divided into three, fairly equal parts, each of which had a different length of time to run before maturity. Furthermore, it was normal for the date at which these bills matured to be determined 'after sight' in Liverpool. The length of time to maturity of the Davenport bills varied substantially, ranging from less than six months to two-and-a-half years or more, but most bills had from nine to fifteen months to run.

In order to calculate the profitability of Davenport's slaving ventures it is necessary to discount these bill remittances.⁴⁶ As the value and length of time to maturity of the various bills sets are known from the original accounts, we simply require the normal rate of discount at this time. This seems to have been about 5 per cent per annum in peacetime and 6 per cent in wartime.⁴⁷ Using the rate appropriate to the prevailing situation, it thus becomes a straightforward matter to calculate the present value of bill remittances. The effect of these calculations is to reduce the total value of slave remittances by approximately £20,000, or just over 6 per cent. This assumes, of course, that bills were paid at the due time. If payment was delayed it was usual to charge interest on the outstanding balance.⁴⁸ However, rates of interest in the mid-eighteenth century were usually lower than the

average earnings made by Davenport on his seventy-four slaving voyages. Consequently any delays in the payment of bills would tend to drag down marginally the overall rate of return on these voyages. But fortunately for Davenport, the great majority of his bills seem to have been paid on time.

The adjustments described above are summarised in the charts contained in the appendix. The net effect of these adjustments on the original data is quite substantial, particularly with regard to the outlay account and the general picture of profitability. Total outlays on the seventy-four voyages were originally almost £324,000; after adjustment this is raised to nearly £362,000, or by about 12 per cent. Total net returns, by contrast, are increased from £375,000 to just over £400,000, or by only 7 per cent. The difference in the impact of these adjustments upon the outlay and inset accounts is reflected ultimately in the average return from these seventy-four voyages. The original unadjusted data suggest an average return of 15.7 per cent per venture. After allowing for adjustments this is reduced by about one-third to 10.5 per cent. Two observations are perhaps worth making about this result. First, the addition of insurance charges had a significant effect upon profit margins, for on balance the Davenport ventures would appear to have lost quite noticeably on the insurance account. The cost of full insurance on these seventy-four voyages was over £34,000, whilst losses recovered totalled slightly over £26,000. Of course, it may be objected that not all slave-traders insured, in which case both premiums and claims would have to be reduced. But more significant may be the fact that the loss of £8,000 on insurance account was perhaps more apparent than real for mid-eighteenth-century slave-traders normally insured amongst themselves.⁴⁹ Consequently the losses incurred by those investing in this particular group of voyages could have been covered largely by earnings from insurance premiums on the voyages of other traders;⁵⁰ it is quite possible that Davenport benefited from this himself. Second, the adjustments which I have adopted may be thought to be biased in such a way as to squeeze profit margins to some extent. It is possible, for instance, that the assumed rate of discount for goods bought on credit in outlays is too low. Nevertheless I believe that any further refinement of the data contained in the Davenport accounts is unlikely to change substantially the picture of profits suggested by them.

THE ACCOUNTS: PATTERNS OF PROFITS

Before proceeding to discuss the picture of profits suggested by the adjusted Davenport accounts, one point should be strongly emphasised: as William Davenport was the only merchant to be involved in all of these voyages we are dealing essentially with his trading experience alone. Moreover, the accounts provide no more than a partial view of even his trading fortunes, for they cover less than half of the voyages in which he was concerned. Thus, although Davenport's accounts offer us some important insights into the profitability of the trade, it would obviously be rash, especially in the light of our still limited knowledge of the trade, to make hasty generalisations about the Liverpool or English trade as a whole on the basis of these accounts. Bearing this in mind, analysis of the accounts will proceed along two lines. There will be an initial discussion of the average rate of profit, the aspect of profitability which has attracted most attention from historians, and this will be followed by a description and examination of fluctuations and regionally related variations in profit margins.

As a prelude to the discussion of average profits, it is worthwhile trying to determine what merchants expected by way of profits in this trade. Contemporary statements on such matters are, of course, not always reliable, and one must also guard against the danger of confusing opinions based on short-lived outbursts of enthusiasm or pessimism with balanced and judicious statements of general expectations. Naturally a comment by Davenport himself would be ideal, but to my knowledge none is available. During the investigations into the slave trade in the late 1780s, however, some notable Liverpool merchants such as John Tarleton and Robert Norris were questioned about its profitability. Responding to these enquiries John Tarleton suggested that 'Ten per Cent ought to be the Net Profit in the African Trade'.⁵¹ Norris was rather more explicit, replying that 'If I could have £.5 per cent at Home, I think I should not risk it [i.e. his money] to Africa under £.10'.⁵²

Views such as these, elicited against a background of abolitionist pressure, may not be totally trustworthy, yet if Tarleton and Norris gave false information it seems likely that they would have tended to understate their expectations. But even if we take

their statements at face value, they are not easy to interpret. For one thing we cannot be sure whether they were thinking in terms of venture or annual profits, though Norris's statement seems to imply the latter. Yet Norris's statement is not above suspicion, if only because 5 per cent happened to be the legal maximum rate for usury in his time. Furthermore, yields on some safe eighteenth-century investments, such as government stock, very often fell short of this, though, as Ashton pointed out, rates of interest may have been nearer the legal maximum in expanding industrial areas such as Lancashire.⁵³ Thus for the purpose of establishing a yardstick against which to measure the success of Davenport's slaving voyages, I have interpreted the Tarleton and Norris statements in their strictest sense, namely in annual terms. But it is recognised that it is just possible to interpret them in a different way, which casts a more favourable light on the Davenport voyages.

The average venture profit on the seventy-four voyages covered by the Davenport accounts was 10.5 per cent. In order to convert this into an annual return it is necessary to know what the average voyage-time was in these ventures. It has been possible to calculate times for only forty-one of the seventy-four voyages.⁵⁴ Times varied greatly—the shortest voyage taking only eleven months, the longest forty months—but the average time was eighteen months. Taking this as the average for all seventy-four voyages, and assuming a rate of interest of 5 per cent per annum, discounted net insets after twelve months totalled £391,111. This represents an annual return of 8.1 per cent on an initial outlay of £361,965. Allowing for some possible bias in the methods of adjustment that I have used, it seems that Davenport's profits from these ventures fell not too far short of the suggested norm. But it should be pointed out that this rate of profit was achieved largely as a result of two extraordinary voyages made by the *Hawke* in 1779 and 1780 towards the end of Davenport's career. Leaving these two voyages aside, the annual return on the remaining seventy-two averaged only 4.3 per cent, which was hardly better than yields on 3 per cent consols during the 1760s and 1770s.⁵⁵ Faced with this evidence, it seems reasonable to ask why Davenport remained so long involved in the trade.⁵⁶

In order to try to answer this it is useful to refer again to the *Hawke's* voyages. Whether or not one should exclude the *Hawke's*

voyages in 1779 and 1780 as freakish voyages is a debatable point. But on balance it does not seem sensible to me to exclude them. Both contemporaries and historians have often emphasised the speculative character of slave-trading; in other words, the chance of making occasional spectacular profits may well have lured funds into the trade.⁵⁷ Essential to this view is the idea that profit margins fluctuated enormously in the slave trade. That this happened is amply illustrated by Davenport's accounts. Table I below summarises the rates of profit made on the sixty-two ventures covered by his accounts.⁵⁸ Losses were made on at least one out of every three of these ventures. But profits of over 20 per

TABLE 1 *Profits per Venture as revealed by the adjusted Davenport accounts*

<i>Rate of Profit or Loss</i>	<i>Number of Profit-making Ventures</i>	<i>Number of Losing Ventures</i>
0-9%	11	7
10-19%	5	8
20-29%	9	2
30-39%	5	3
40-49%	4	2
50-59%	3	-
60-69%	1	-
70-79%	2	-
Over 80%	1	-

Source: as appendix.

cent were made in twenty-five instances; and in seven ventures profits averaged over 50 per cent. Highly profitable voyages were not uncommon, therefore, and in a trade of this sort merchants may well have come to expect and even to depend upon the occasional financial killing. In this respect it should be remembered that Davenport's accounts cover less than half of the slaving voyages in which he invested. Accounts are lacking especially for voyages made during the early stages of his career. It is thus not inconceivable that Davenport made financial killings similar to those of the *Hawke* in these other voyages, and that this helped to sustain his interest in the trade. It is also worth recalling that by the late 1760s at least Davenport had become a supplier of

beads and doubtless other goods to the slave trade. Profits from these activities presumably supplemented earnings from his direct investments in the trade.

How important speculative factors were in attracting funds into the slave trade is very difficult to assess, but given the range of fluctuations in profits just noticed, some funds were doubtless drawn into the trade for these reasons. It seems unlikely, however, that Davenport's lasting involvement in the trade can be attributed in any major way to speculation. This is suggested not only by his substantial and sustained commitment to the trade over a forty-year period and his role as a manager of ventures, but also by apparently shrewd changes over time in the distribution of his investments between various trading centres in West Africa.

Davenport's astuteness emerges from two other related aspects of profits revealed by his accounts. Firstly, profit margins seem to have improved over time. This is indicated by Table 2, where investments in the seventy-four voyages covered by his accounts, together with the corresponding net returns, are divided into

TABLE 2 *Adjusted outlays, insets and profits by selected time periods*

	<i>Outlays</i>	<i>Net insets</i>	<i>Profits</i>
<i>1757 to 1767</i>			
Miscellaneous voyages	24255	24176	
Old Calabar	19154	18821	
Cameroons	10657	12386	
	54066	55383	1317
<i>1768 to 1775</i>			
Miscellaneous voyages	29950	28256	
Old Calabar	142350	151529	
Cameroons	59556	68904	
	231856	248689	16833
<i>1776 to 1784</i>			
Old Calabar	17905	21645	
Cameroons	58128	75162	
	76033	96807	20774

Sources: as appendix.

three periods, 1757 to 1767, 1768 to 1775 and 1776 to 1784. In the first period profits per venture averaged only 2.4 per cent. These rose to 7.3 per cent in the following period, and reached no less than 27.3 per cent in the final period. Although profits in the last period were affected by the *Hawke's* voyages in 1779 and 1780, general rates of profit seem to have improved between the 1760s and the 1770s.

The rising trend in profits from these voyages coincided with a noticeable shift within West Africa of the overall regional distribution of Davenport's trading ventures. As was mentioned earlier, he was strongly attracted to the Gambia trade in his early career, but during the late 1750s became interested in Old Calabar and especially the Cameroons. The following decade was a period of experimentation to some extent, in which Davenport invested in voyages to several places other than Old Calabar and the Cameroons. Trading on a broad front seems, however, to have brought him little financial success, and around 1770 he started to concentrate almost completely upon trade to Old Calabar and the Cameroons.⁶⁹ This pattern of trade persisted more or less to the end of his career. A glance at the relative profit levels in the different areas of trade makes this change in his trading habits understandable. Accounts have survived for only eleven of his ventures to places other than Old Calabar and the Cameroons, and almost all of these were sent out in the 1760s. Losses on these ventures averaged 3.3 per cent per venture. Profits from thirty-seven Old Calabar voyages, on the other hand, averaged 7.0 per cent and from twenty-six Cameroons voyages averaged 21.9 per cent (or 11.6 per cent if the *Hawke's* voyages of 1779 and 1780 are excluded). Thus the changing regional distribution of Davenport's investments suggests that he was in close touch with the situation in West Africa and was alert to favourable trading opportunities.

This is not the place to try to explain in detail why some of Davenport's ventures, notably those to the Cameroons, should have proved more successful than others. What the accounts do make clear, however, is that the structure of slave-trading differed, often considerably, from one place to another on the West African coast. Thus it is conceivable that local peculiarities in trade may have helped to create, in the short term at least, regionally related variations in profitability. Several notable

differences in the trades of Old Calabar and the Cameroons are indicated by Davenport's accounts. Cargoes bound for Old Calabar were composed very differently from those destined for the Cameroons. Cotton textiles and copper rods were major items of trade at the former place but seem to have been of hardly any significance at the Cameroons, where iron bars, brass pans and basins, and above all beads were in great demand.⁶⁰ Furthermore, Davenport vessels trading at Old Calabar often operated in tandem, a larger vessel supplying a smaller 'tender' with slaves, but vessels trading at the Cameroons worked singly. Differences also existed even in the cargoes of African produce and the type of slaves obtainable at these two places. Ships trading at the Cameroons generally returned home with larger supplementary cargoes of African produce such as ivory than those trading at Old Calabar. And they appear, too, to have obtained larger proportions of adult male slaves and fewer children than Old Calabar ships.

No doubt some of these differences in the Old Calabar and the Cameroons trades in Davenport's time were due to the fact that the Cameroons was, by comparison with Old Calabar, a new centre of slave-trading. In the current state of our knowledge, however, it is impossible to explain all the differences in the trade, or to assess their possible influence on levels of profits in the slave trade. But what this analysis of the Davenport accounts suggests is that there is still a great deal to be learned about profits in the slave trade, particularly about the causes and effects of fluctuations and other variations of profits.

CONCLUSIONS

The two main conclusions to be drawn from this analysis of the accounts of William Davenport can be stated quite simply. First, overall profits from seventy-four voyages averaged around 8 per cent per annum; in this respect the profits earned by Davenport were quite close to the level which some of his near contemporaries thought acceptable, and also tend to confirm the conclusions reached by other recent studies of profitability in the English slave trade.⁶¹ However, Davenport's overall level of earnings probably exceeded those made by many French, Dutch and Danish slave-traders at the same time.⁶² Second, the accounts clearly demon-

strate that marked fluctuations in profits were experienced from one voyage to another. More interestingly perhaps they also suggest that Davenport achieved higher profits in the Cameroons trade than in the other trades in which he was involved, though how this came about and how long it may have persisted is impossible to say as yet. In the last resort, however, it was his earnings from the Cameroons trade that assured Davenport of an adequate overall level of profits from these voyages.

It is very difficult to say how far Davenport's profits were typical of those earned by Liverpool slave-traders in general. Given his pioneering activity in the Cameroons trade it would, of course, be fatally easy to argue that Davenport's career exemplified that spirit of enterprise and adventure which is sometimes supposed to have contributed to the growth of Liverpool's dominance of the English slave trade by the second half of the eighteenth century. Despite an abundance of literature on the subject, however, there are still very large gaps in our knowledge of the Liverpool slave trade; in particular, surprisingly little is known in detail about the size, composition and character of the Liverpool slave-trading community at any stage of the eighteenth century.⁶³ Furthermore, the uncertainty and complexity of the trade, to which the Davenport accounts bear ample testimony, would strongly suggest that a 'typical' slave-trader probably never existed. If the evidence of Bristol is anything to go by,⁶⁴ Liverpool slave-traders were almost certainly drawn from a wide variety of social and economic backgrounds, and slave-trading probably engaged their capital and energy in widely varying degrees. For the moment, therefore, Davenport's career must stand as an individual example of wholehearted, enterprising and seemingly successful involvement in the eighteenth-century Liverpool slave trade.

But in one respect at least the picture of profits revealed by the Davenport accounts has perhaps wider significance. The English slave trade in the eighteenth century was, above all else, a dynamic trade. Many dramatic and subtle changes occurred in its structure and organisation during the course of the century. Among the more dramatic were the shift in the centre of slave-trading from London to Bristol and finally to Liverpool, the exploitation of new sources of slave supply in West Africa, notably in the Bight of Biafra, and the growth and development of

markets for slaves in the New World. Our understanding of such changes is, however, still imperfect, partly because of the limitations of the surviving evidence, but also because most traditional works as well as many of the more recent studies of the trade have tended to be concerned with measuring average earnings. This general preoccupation with the 'average' situation has often led historians to gloss over the causes and equally important the

APPENDIX *Profits and losses in the voyages of William Davenport, 1757-1784*

THE CAMEROONS

<i>Vessel</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Original Outlay £</i>	<i>Ship Account £</i>	<i>Insurance £</i>	<i>Credit £</i>	<i>Discount £</i>	<i>(3+4+ 5-7) Adjusted Outlay £</i>
<i>CALVELEY</i>	1758	1545	—	232	425	20	1757
<i>HENRY</i>	1765	2241	150	194	619	29	2756
<i>WILLIAM</i>	1766	2169	—	163	384	18	2314
<i>KING OF PRUSSIA</i>	1767	3610	—	271	1081	51	3830
<i>WILLIAM</i>	1768	2150	—	161	614	29	2282
<i>WILLIAM</i>	1769	2142	—	161	349	17	2286
<i>HENRY</i>	1769	2476	361	213	1353	64	2986
<i>KING OF PRUSSIA</i>	1769	3649	490	310	2190	104	4345
<i>KING OF PRUSSIA</i>	1771	3302	447	281	1478	70	3960
<i>KING OF PRUSSIA</i>	1772	3320	472	284	1366	65	4011
<i>BADGER</i>	1772	4187	—	314	1439	69	4432
<i>FOX</i>	1773	3335	—	250	—	—	3585
<i>KING OF PRUSSIA</i>	1773	3607	427	303	872	42	4295
<i>KING OF PRUSSIA</i>	1774	3720	443	312	1038	49	4426
<i>BADGER</i>	1774	4659	—	349	1668	79	4929
<i>BADGER</i>	1775	5012	—	376	1249	59	5329
<i>FAVORITE</i>	1775	5574	—	418	1581	75	5917
<i>SAM</i>	1775	6393	—	479	2081	99	6773
<i>KING OF PRUSSIA</i>	1776	5217	458	851	1364	65	6461
<i>BADGER</i>	1776	10646	—	1597	3404	162	12081
<i>HAWKE</i>	1779	6164	—	925	4447	212	6877
<i>HAWKE</i>	1780	4972	928	885	3367	160	6625
<i>PRESTON</i>	1780	3984	—	598	2337	112	4470
<i>HAWKE</i>	1781	6498	—	975	2811	135	7338
<i>PRESTON</i>	1781	4669	—	700	1920	91	5278
<i>PRESTON</i>	1783	7969	597	642	4408	210	8998
Total CAMEROONS		113210					128341
				Average outlay			
					£4936		

consequences of structural and organisational change. Yet, as Davenport's accounts seem to demonstrate, changes in trading patterns, such as the growth of the Cameroons trade, may well have made an important contribution to maintaining profit levels in the trade. To be realistic, therefore, any further consideration of profits in the slave trade will have to recognise the possible implications of changes in the general structure of the trade.

9	10	11	12	13	14	15 (9+10+11 -(12+14)) Adjusted Net	16 (15-8) LOSS (-) or PROFIT
Original Net Inset £	Residual £	Losses Recoverable £	Insurance £	Bills £	Discount £	Inset £	£
514	—	1350*	29	—	—	1835	78
3172	350	—	26	2752	131	3365	609
2640	—	—	19	1919	91	2530	216
4430	490	—	40	3783	224	4656	826
3085	—	—	9	2600	63	3013	731
2692	—	—	21	1865	45	2636	350
2751	282	—	9	2327	111	2913	-67
3584	447	—	38	2457	60	3933	-412
5528	472	—	18	5486	325	5657	1697
6883	427	—	19	6511	386	6905	2894
7160	—	—	27	6348	376	6757	2325
4601	—	—	16	4093	131	4454	869
5902	443	—	17	5948	190	6138	1843
5156	458	—	18	5037	299	5297	871
5248	—	—	109	—	—	5139	210
6574	—	—	21	5524	461	6092	763
4926	—	—	123	3806	317	4486	-1431
1132	—	4560	208	—	—	5484	-1289
7601	—	—	48	6229	765	6788	327
14382	—	—	150	8407	1215	13017	936
12500	928	—	147	9910	1345	11936	5059
16843	—	—	318	5364	156	16369	9744
4654	586	—	91	4823	402	4747	277
203	—	6173	—	—	—	6376	-962
7145	597	—	114	5530	313	7315	2037
7478	1456	—	35	4803	285	8614	-384
146784						156452	28111

* Slaves valued at £30 each 25% abatement.

9 Original Net Inset £	10 Residual £	11 Losses Recoverable £	12 Insurance £	13 Bills £	14 Discount £	15 Adjusted Net Inset £	16 LOSS (-) or PROFIT £
8857	—	—	59	7339	108	8690	2649
548	—	4616	—	—	—	5164	—902
5157	—	—	42	5074	148	4967	—2080
8246	461	—	46	3931	187	8294	1396
	—	—	—*	3037	180		
8650	204	—	4	3199	114	9044	2087
	518	—	23	5250	187		
6190	—	—	46	3936	96	6048	—661
4197	340	—	7	4259	136	4394	2619
5603	855	—	40	5376	319	6099	—1666
3465	—	—	12	3235	79	3374	1657
8049	—	—	8	7788	373	7668	2238
3889	—	—	2	3527	126	3761	2280
9613	789	—	40†	4498	160	10193	719
	378	—	—	4945	387		
7771	581	—	26‡	4743	169	7993	210
	—	—	—	4609	164		
2449	722	—	27	2488	61	3083	—3394
4485	—	—	12	3917	96	4377	2195
4155	279	—	10	3908	232	4192	1029
1490	—	4466	—	—	—	5956	—845
5242	356	—	6	5544	264	5328	1367
2950	—	—	21	2328	83	2846	—1993
1887	—	—	20	1806	86	1781	—5359
6117	—	—	52	3709	220	5845	1478
7581	684	—	32	6985	414	7819	1308
4146	846	—	37	4219	201	4754	—3194
4203	277	—	18	3818	136	4326	1538
9114	614	—	136	4018	335	9257	3376
4506	387	—	17	4389	366	4520	28
9171	—	—	51§	2808	198	8693	—879
	—	—	—	4815	229		
5074	248	—	19	4695	392	4911	2210
6615	872	—	42	5653	472	6973	—575
3422	—	—	50	2813	235	3137	—1163
11009	1181	—	60	9946	589	11541	4057
7350	—	—	35	5863	348	6967	846
181201						191995	12576

* Vessel sold at Grenada.

† Includes Swift.

‡ Includes Andromache.

§ Includes May.

MISCELLANEOUS

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Vessel	Year	Original Outlay £	Ship Account £	Insurance £	Credit £	Discount £	Adjusted Outlay £
EADITH	1760	3209	—	491	2263	109	3591
EADITH	1761	3011	—	452	1800	86	3377
PLUMPER	1762	3802	402	631	2694	128	4707
LITTLE BRITAIN	1764	2233	—	167	1282	61	2339
SISTERS	1764	5303	—	398	423	20	5681
WILLIAM	1764	2281	—	171	1530	59	2393
HENRY	1767	1700	350	154	771	37	2167
PLUMPER	1768	5833	—	437	2979	142	6128
PLUMPER	1769	5716	629	476	1363	65	6756
TRUE BLUE	1770	9083	—	681	5299	252	9512
PLUMPER	1771	6680	537	541	4283	204	7554
Total		48851					54205

Source: *Calvey*, *Chesterfield* and *Eadith*: Liverpool Museum, MSS. 53-34; all others: University of Keele Library, Raymond Richards Collection, Davies-Davenport papers, Davenport trading accounts (nine volumes).

NOTES

I am grateful to my colleagues Donald Woodward and Bernard Foley at the University of Hull for their advice and comments upon earlier drafts of this article. My thanks are due also to Bruce Anderson of the Department of Economic History, University of Liverpool, with whom I have had very useful discussions about the Davenport papers. I am indebted to the Social Science Research Council for financial assistance towards some of the research underlying this paper.

- 1 See for instance Roger Anstey, *The Atlantic slave trade and British abolition 1760-1810* (1975), chap. 2.
- 2 Eric Williams, *Capitalism and slavery* (Chapel Hill, 1944; reprinted New York, 1967), pp. 36-9.
- 3 Jean Meyer, *L'armement nantais dans la deuxième moitié du XVIII^e siècle* (Paris, 1969), chap. 6.
- 4 K. G. Davies, *The Royal African Company* (1957); Stanley Dumbell, 'The profits of the Guinea trade', *Economic Journal*, 2 (1931), pp. 254-7; F. E. Hyde, B. B. Parkinson and Sheila Marriner, 'The nature and profitability of the Liverpool slave trade', *Economic History Review*, 2nd series, 5 (1952-3), pp. 368-77; W. E. Minchinton, 'The voyage of the snow *Africa*', *Mariner's Mirror*, 37 (1951), pp. 187-96.
- 5 The main body of the Davenport papers is to be found among the Davies-Davenport papers, Raymond Richards collection, University of Keele (subsequently referred to as Davies-Davenport). The papers include a ledger 1763-75, a letter and bill book, a bead book 1766-70,

9 Original Net Inset £	10 Residual £	11 Losses Recoverable £	12 Insurance £	13 Bills £	14 Discount £	15 Adjusted Net Inset £	16 LOSS (—) or PROFIT £
4098	—	—	20	3591	104	3974	383
35	—	2869	—	—	—	2904	—473
4863	—	2326	49	4967	97	7043	2336
2289	—	—	5	1942	92	2192	—147
5468*	—	—	40	3564	119	5309	—372
1407	—	—	10	1101	26	1371	—1022
1086	361	—	8	910	29	1410	—757
6978	629	—	99	1640	96	7412	1284
6615	537	—	97	2695	211	6844	88
5864	1001	—	91	1555	92	6682	—2830
7846	—	—	10	8736	518	7318	—236
46549						52432	—1773

* Incomplete.

and nine volumes of trading accounts. I am very grateful to the University of Keele Library and especially to Mr I. H. C. Fraser, Keeper of Archives, for allowing me to consult these papers and to quote material from them. A few additional trading accounts of Davenport, relating to the voyages of the *Calveley*, the *Chesterfield*, and the *Eadith*, are to be found at the Liverpool City Museum, MSS. 53-4. I am indebted to the museum for permission to examine and cite from these accounts.

- 6 The Davenports were a Cheshire-based gentry family, and Davies Davenport was heir to the family estates in the county. He was also a member of Gray's Inn and the Inner Temple. Marriage to Penelope Ward added Capesthorpe Hall to the family's property in Cheshire. Penelope bore Davies, in sixteen years of marriage, ten children, seven of them boys. The oldest son, John, died early, leaving the second son, another Davies, to pursue a legal career and later to inherit the Cheshire estates. Information derived from *Burke's Landed Gentry* (18th ed., 1965-72), I, p. 190.
- 7 I owe this information to Mr L. W. Lawson Edwards, Librarian of the Society of Genealogists, London. There is nothing about William Davenport's apprenticeship in the Liverpool Apprentice Enrolment Book, 352 CLE/REG 4/1, Local History Collection, Liverpool Public Library (subsequently LPL).
- 8 Based upon information abstracted from the Liverpool Plantation

- Registers 1739-73, 1779-84, and kindly supplied to me by Mr Maurice Schofield (subsequently referred to as Plantation Registers).
- 9 LPL, 352 CLE/REG 2/2, Freeman's Register. See also 352 CLE/REG 1/7, Fines Book 1746-90.
 - 10 Another brother, Thomas, also seems to have been concerned in some of William's slaving ventures, but apparently resided in London.
 - 11 Plantation Registers.
 - 12 See *Gore's Liverpool Directory* for 1766, 1767, 1769, 1772, 1774, 1777, 1781; *Bailey's Western and Midland Directory*, 1783. Copies of these are available on microfilm at LPL.
 - 13 *Gore's Liverpool Directory*, 1790; Robert Craig and Rupert Jarvis (eds.), *Liverpool registry of merchant ships* (Chetham Society, 3rd series, 15, 1967), pp. 105-6.
 - 14 William Davenport died a bachelor. According to an obituary in *Billinge's Liverpool Advertiser*, 28.8.1797, he left the bulk of his fortune to his brother Richard of Great Marlow, Buckinghamshire, and his nephew Davies Davenport of Capesthorpe. He was buried at St Nicholas' Church, Prescot. I have not been able to trace his will.
 - 15 LPL, 352 MD 1, Committee Book of the African Company of Merchants Trading from Liverpool 1750-1820.
 - 16 LPL, Holt and Gregson Papers, 942 HOL 10, f. 411. The *Sturdy Beggar*, the ship concerned, took three prizes from May to September 1779 before it was destroyed by a storm in October of the same year: Gomer Williams, *History of the Liverpool privateers and letters of marque with an account of the Liverpool slave trade* (Liverpool, 1897; reprinted New York, 1966), p. 253.
 - 17 Plantation Registers.
 - 18 Davies-Davenport, bead book.
 - 19 Bristol Central Library, Southwell papers, 9, abstract of a cargo for Bonny. By the end of the eighteenth century agents of Italian bead manufacturers were evidently establishing themselves in English slaving ports, notably Liverpool: Public Record Office (subsequently PRO), Chancery Masters' Exhibits, C107/9, 14.1.1790, Moses Abram Fonseca to [James] Rogers and company; C107/15, 16.1.1790, Lawrence Sermoniti to James Rogers and company.
 - 20 See my introduction to *The Tarleton papers* (Wakefield, 1975), in the series *British records relating to America on microfilm* (gen. ed. W. E. Minchinton); D. J. Popc, 'Shipping and trade in the port of Liverpool 1783-93', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Liverpool (1970), 2, chap. 5.
 - 21 Based on Davies-Davenport, account books; Plantation Registers; PRO, Board of Trade 6/3, ff. 99-129 (subsequently referred to as BT List).
 - 22 Based on the data contained in the original accounts. See appendix.
 - 23 This was his average investment in the seventy-four voyages for which accounts have survived.
 - 24 BT List; John Rylands Library, Manchester, Eng. MSS. 517, f. 2. A small number of non-slaving ships may have been included in these lists of clearances for Africa, but these few 'wood' ships, as they were often called, do not affect significantly the broad argument suggested here.
 - 25 Evidence of African destinations is found in BT List and Davies-Davenport, account books.
 - 26 Davies-Davenport, letter and bill book, 28.1.1755, William and Christopher Davenport to Austin and Laurens.

- 27 BT List. It is just possible that Davenport was referring to total English clearances to Africa but this seems doubtful.
- 28 P. D. Curtin, *The Atlantic slave trade: a census* (Madison, 1969), p. 150.
- 29 I owe this information to Professor R. A. Austen of the University of Chicago.
- 30 Davies-Davenport, letter and bill book, 24.2.1757, William Davenport to Francis Delop and John and William Halliday.
- 31 Based on Plantation Registers and BT List.
- 32 Accounts of the snow *Aston*, 1771, 1773, Liverpool City Museum, MSS. 55-503.
- 33 Further discussion of this point can be found in my paper 'English exports to West Africa in the eighteenth century', presented at a slave trade symposium held at Colby College, Maine, in August 1975. A revised version of this paper is to appear in a forthcoming edited collection of the conference papers to be published by Princeton University Press.
- 34 This and the remainder of this paragraph draws on my unpublished paper 'The slave merchants of the outports', presented at the Organisation of American Historians' Congress, Chicago, 1973.
- 35 Based on BT List; Davies-Davenport, bead book; Peet papers, XIV, 158, 160, Harold Cohen Library, University of Liverpool.
- 36 PRO, Board of Trade 6/7; *Parliamentary Papers* 24 (1789), 633, pp. 20, 47; PP 29 (1790), 698, p. 500; LPL, 942 HOL 10, pp. 367-9.
- 37 This figure is suggested by the Davenport accounts and the evidence of Norris; the evidence of Tarleton and Green, which I believe is less reliable, indicates that the ship constituted 40 per cent of the combined ship and outfit charges.
- 38 This applies only when the value of the ship is omitted on the first occasion that it enters into the accounts. The ship's value at the start of subsequent voyages is assumed to have been its written-down value at the end of the previous voyage.
- 39 Davies-Davenport, ledger; PRO, C107/11, 1768-1775 underwriting books of Abraham Clibborn.
- 40 A. H. John, 'The London Assurance Company and the marine insurance market of the eighteenth century', *Economica*, new series 25 (1958), p. 140.
- 41 The evidence is to be found in both the invoices and the summaries of total outset costs.
- 42 Davies-Davenport, letter and bill book, 12.6.1758, William Davenport to Patrick and Richard Macky; Birmingham Reference Library, Galton papers, 405/1, 13.7.1754, 20.11.1755, Samuel Galton to John Parr; LPL, Tuohy papers, 380 TUO 2/4, 5.10.1775, David Tuohy to Ryan and Begone; 380 TUO 3/1, 5.12.1769, account with James Clemens.
- 43 For calculating the present value of goods bought on credit I have used the standard formula $PV = \sum \frac{A}{(1+r)^n}$ where A is the value of goods bought on credit, r is the rate of interest, and n the length of credit in years.
- 44 Elizabeth Donnan (ed.), *Documents illustrative of the slave trade to America* (Washington, 1930-35), 2, p. 541.
- 45 R. B. Sheridan, 'The commercial and financial organisation of the

- British slave trade, 1750-1807', *Economic History Review*, 2nd series, 11 (1958), pp. 249-63.
- 46 Using the same formula as earlier, see note 43.
- 47 PRO, C107/9, 16.10.1790, Robert Cooper Lee to James Rogers and company; Sidney Homer, *A history of interest rates* (New Brunswick, 1963), p. 165.
- 48 See Davies-Davenport, accounts of the *Badger*, 1776-88.
- 49 Davies-Davenport, ledger; John, 'London Assurance . . .', *op. cit.*, p. 128.
- 50 *Ibid.*, p. 133.
- 51 PP 24 (1789), 633, p. 50.
- 52 PP 24 (1789), 632, p. 8. It is worth pointing out that Norris considered that this constituted a 'Saving Voyage'.
- 53 T. S. Ashton, *Economic fluctuations in England 1700-1800* (1959), p. 88 and appendix, Table 9.
- 54 BT List.
- 55 Ashton, *op. cit.*, appendix, Table 9.
- 56 This assumes, of course, that Davenport himself recognised that the story told by the original accounts was not the true one.
- 57 James Wallace, *A general and descriptive history of the ancient and present state of the town of Liverpool* (Liverpool, 1795), p. 231.
- 58 Although the accounts cover seventy-four voyages, ventures numbered only sixty-two because twelve vessels appear to have acted as 'tenders' to other larger ships.
- 59 Based on Plantation Registers and BT List.
- 60 This point will be discussed further in my forthcoming article on English exports to Africa (see note 33 above).
- 61 Anstey, *Atlantic slave trade*, *op. cit.*, chap. 2; S. L. Engerman, 'The slave trade and British capital formation in the eighteenth century: a comment on the Williams thesis', *Business History Review*, 46 (1972), pp. 430-43; R. P. Thomas and R. N. Bean, 'The fishers of men: the profits of the slave trade', *Journal of Economic History*, 34 (1974), pp. 893-900.
- 62 Meyer, *L'armement nantais*, *op. cit.*; Perry Viles, 'The slaving interest of the Atlantic ports, 1763-1792', *French Historical Studies*, 7 (1972), pp. 529-44; Robert Stein, 'The profitability of the Nantes slave trade', *Journal of Economic History*, 35 (1975), pp. 779-93; Georg Nørregard, *Danish settlements in West Africa, 1658-1850* (Boston, 1966), p. 93; W. S. Unger, 'Bijdragen tot de geschiedenis van de Nederlandse slavenhandel: de slavenhandel der Middelburgsche Commerce Compagnie, 1732-1808', *Economisch-Historisch Jaarboek*, 28 (1958), pp. 87-9, 110-13.
- 63 This is an aspect of the Liverpool slave trade on which I am currently working.
- 64 See note 34 above.

Volume and tonnage of the Liverpool slave trade 1772-1807

D. P. LAMB

THE VOLUME OF THE TRADE

During the eighteenth century Britain took an increasingly large share of the Atlantic slave trade.¹ The course of the British trade in the early and mid-eighteenth century, measured by the numbers of vessels clearing to West Africa in selected years, is shown in Table 1, which distinguishes the major English slave-trading ports, Bristol, Liverpool and London.²

TABLE 1 *Clearances of vessels to West Africa, 1710-71³*

<i>Years</i>	<i>Total clearances from Liverpool London and Bristol</i>	<i>Clearances from Liverpool</i>	<i>Clearances from London</i>	<i>Clearances from Bristol</i>
1710	46	2	24	20
1725	150	unknown	87	63
1730-39*	85	21	25	39
1750-59*	82	49	13	20
1771	188	107	58	23

* Average annual figures rounded to the nearest whole number.

It will be seen that the numbers of clearances fluctuated considerably. During the early years of the century, London was Britain's major slaving port, Bristol's interest in the trade was also significant, whilst Liverpool's share, as far as can be seen, was small. However, by the 1730s, Bristol's slave trade had

increased considerably to challenge successfully London's dominance, while Liverpool's interest in the trade had also developed substantially. Further changes are apparent by the 1750s. Liverpool had replaced Bristol as Britain's leading slaving port and as a result the slave trades of both Bristol and London suffered an absolute decline. By 1771, the trade was much greater than in the 1750s, but despite a revival of London's trade Liverpool's leading position remained.

The general course of the English slave trade between 1772 and 1807 will now be examined. Table 2 lists the average number

TABLE 2 *Average annual clearances* from English ports to West Africa, 1772-75 to 1805-07*

Years	Total Clearances	Clearances from:				
		Liverpool London and Bristol	Liverpool	London	Bristol	other English ports
1772-75	161	156	95	40	22	5
1776-82	61	59	35	17	6	2
1783-92		145	88	31	25	
1793-1804		131	107	18	5	
1805-07			101			

* Average annual figures rounded to the nearest whole number.

of all vessels clearing annually from English ports to West Africa between 1772-5 and 1805-7 in both the slave and the commodity trade.⁴ The level of activity in the trade with West Africa between 1772-5 and 1805-7 was very irregular. The years of peace from 1772 to 1775 saw an average of 161 clearances a year to West Africa, but this was sharply reduced to an average of 61 vessels a year during the American War of Independence from 1776 to 1782. The years 1783 to 1792 mark a period of recovery in the trade, with the level of clearances approaching those of 1772-5. During the years of war from 1793 onwards, there was some reduction in the average annual level of clearances, although the decline appears to have been only slight compared with the recession in the period 1776-82. Vessels from Liverpool dominated the trade throughout the period. Of the average of 161

clearances a year in 1772-5, 95 were from Liverpool, 40 from London, 22 from Bristol and only 5 from other ports. Clearances from London to West Africa exceeded those from Bristol by an average of 6-18 vessels a year between 1772-5 and 1793-1804. With the failure of London's and especially Bristol's West African trades to recover fully following the outbreak of war in 1793,⁸ Liverpool was able to further consolidate its hold on the West Africa trade.

For the period 1789-95 figures are available of the number of slaving vessels clearing annually from Liverpool, London and Bristol, and these are shown in Table 3.⁹

TABLE 3 *Clearances of slaving vessels, 1789-95*

<i>Year</i>	<i>Clearances from Liverpool, London and Bristol</i>	<i>Clearances from Liverpool</i>	<i>Clearances from London</i>	<i>Clearances from Bristol</i>
1789	94	61	15	18
1790	134	93	16	25
1791	153	97	25	31
1792	195	131	22	42
1793	72	48	12	12
1794	141	110	14	17
1795	96	70	14	12

TABLE 4 *Slaving vessels as a percentage of all vessels clearing to West Africa, 1789-95*

<i>Year</i>	<i>Percentage of slaving vessels from Liverpool, London and Bristol</i>	<i>Percentage of slaving vessels from Liverpool</i>	<i>Percentage of slaving vessels from London</i>	<i>Percentage of slaving vessels from Bristol</i>
1789	78.7	93.8	50.0	72.0
1790	86.0	96.9	52.3	86.2
1791	81.4	94.2	53.2	81.6
1792	83.0	97.0	41.7	89.8
1793	84.7	97.9	52.2	92.3
1794	90.4	95.7	60.9	94.4
1795	89.7	94.6	66.7	100.0

A comparison of the figures in Tables 2 and 3 indicates that slaving vessels formed the majority of the clearances of all vessels to West Africa. In Table 4 the number of slaving vessels as a percentage of all vessels clearing to West Africa from Liverpool, London and Bristol between 1789 and 1795 has been calculated.⁷ Between 80 and 90 per cent of all vessels clearing to West Africa from Liverpool, London and Bristol combined were slaving vessels. However, whilst slaving vessels accounted for between 94 and 98 per cent of all vessels clearing to West Africa from Liverpool,⁸ the proportion from Bristol was rather lower and varied from 72 per cent to 100 per cent, and from London, lower still, varying between 42 per cent and 67 per cent. A second indicator of the level of activity in the trade is the average total tonnage of all vessels clearing annually from English ports to West Africa. Table 5 summarises this information from 1772-5 to 1798-1807.⁹ Table 6 lists the tonnage of slaving vessels clearing annually from Liverpool, London and Bristol between 1789 and 1795.¹⁰

TABLE 5 *Average annual clearances from English ports to West Africa, 1772-75 to 1798-1807 (tons)**

<i>Years</i>	<i>Average tonnage of all clearances</i>	<i>from Liverpool, London and Bristol</i>	<i>from Liverpool</i>	<i>from London</i>	<i>from Bristol</i>	<i>from other English ports</i>
1772-75	17083	16789	10066	4312	2411	294
1776-82	7759	7476	4510	2190	678	291
1783-92		23489	14929	4829	3731	
1793-97		22392	17305	3491	1596	
1798-1807			27605			

* Average annual figures rounded to the nearest whole number.

It will be seen that the course of these tonnage figures conforms closely to that of the clearances of vessels except for some overall increase in the tonnage employed in the periods 1783-92, 1793-7 and 1798-1807. For example, whilst clearances from Liverpool in 1772-5 averaged 95 vessels and in 1804-7 101 vessels, the average tonnage clearing annually from Liverpool rose from 10,066 tons in 1772-5 to 17,305 tons in 1793-7 and 27,605 tons in 1798-1807. This substantial increase in the tonnage of vessels

clearing annually to West Africa is, to some extent, more apparent than real, since it partly sprang from a change in the official method of measuring tonnage. Parliamentary legislation in 1786 laid down that all English vessels should no longer be measured in registered tons, but instead in terms of a smaller unit, the measured ton. As a result, generally speaking, the tonnage of English vessels recorded after 1786 needs reducing by about one-third in order to compare it with the tonnage of vessels assessed

TABLE 6 *Clearances of slaving vessels, 1789-95 (tons)*

Year	<i>Tonnage of clearances from Liverpool, London and Bristol</i>	<i>Tonnage of clearances from Liverpool</i>	<i>Tonnage of clearances from London</i>	<i>Tonnage of clearances from Bristol</i>
1789	16605	11125	2545	2935
1790	25765	18183	3275	4307
1791	27955	18609	4260	5086
1792	35782	24401	3789	7592
1793	14197	9452	2671	2074
1794	28233	21623	3304	3306
1795	17766	12690	2905	2171

before 1786.¹¹ Thus, the average of 27,605 measured tons clearing annually to West Africa from Liverpool in 1798-1807 was about the equivalent of 18,000 registered tons. This is about 8,000 registered tons greater than the average of 10,066 registered tons clearing annually from Liverpool to West Africa in 1772-5 and about 1,000 registered tons greater than the average of 17,083 registered tons clearing annually from England to West Africa in 1772-5. This margin of about 1,000 registered tons represents a real growth in the carrying capacity of the English Atlantic slave trade.¹²

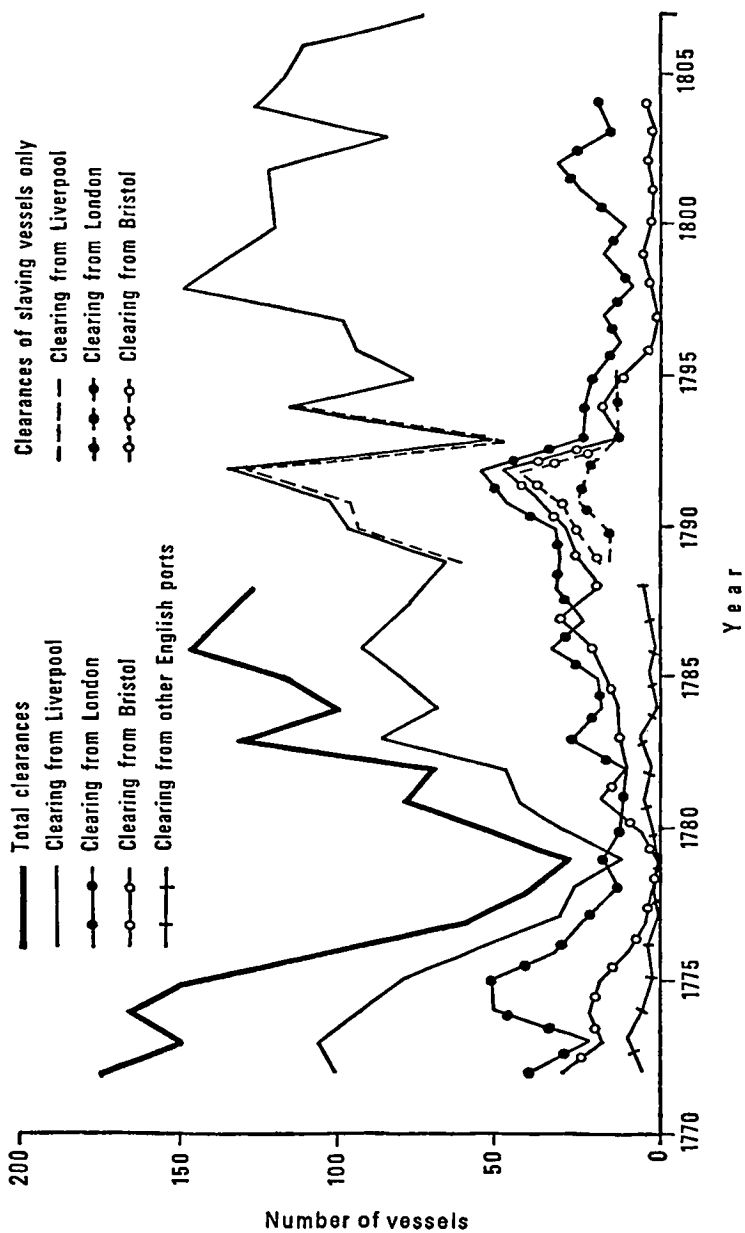
Having established the general course of the trade between 1772 and 1807, attention can now be given to an analysis of the factors affecting the level of activity. A more detailed picture of the level of activity is given on the graph (p. 97) which shows the numbers of vessels clearing annually to West Africa between

1772 and 1807. The early 1770s formed a peak of activity with over 150 vessels clearing from West Africa each year. However, after 1775 with the outbreak of the American War of Independence, a sharp decline is in evidence, reaching a nadir in 1779 when only 28 vessels cleared to West Africa. The years after 1779 and particularly after 1782, with the ending of the American War of Independence, saw an irregular recovery, reaching a peak in 1792 with 235 clearances from Liverpool, London and Bristol combined. But the outbreak of war with France in 1793 brought a sharp decline to 85 clearances from these three ports in that year; recovery followed, but was irregular, and the pre-war level was not reached until 1798. The level of activity in the final decade of the trade appears to have been similar to that prevailing in the early 1770s.

Though these fluctuations are closely mirrored in the tonnage figures (Table 5), it is clear that whilst overall the number of vessels in the trade was basically static, their tonnage increased significantly, even when allowing for the change in the method of assessing tonnage in 1786. Thus, it is clear that larger vessels were being employed during these last years of the trade. In fact, whilst the average tonnage of all vessels clearing from England to West Africa in 1772-5 was 106 registered tons, the average tonnage of vessels clearing to West Africa from Liverpool in 1798-1807 was the equivalent of about 160 registered tons, an increase of over 50 per cent.¹³

It is further apparent that most of the increase in the total tonnage of vessels clearing from Liverpool to West Africa occurred in the later 1790s. Two factors probably explain this growth and its timing. The first was the coming abolition of the trade. During the 1790s it became very clear that the trade was likely to be abolished in the near future, and this is alleged to have produced a rush by plantation owners to stock up with slaves. Secondly, parliamentary legislation in 1788 restricted the number of slaves a vessel was allowed to carry. 'For the first 201 tons, the maximum loading was 5 adult slaves per 3 tons; i.e. 1.67 slaves per ton. For every ton above 201 tons, the maximum loading was 1 adult slave per ton.'¹⁴ This loading ratio appears to have been rather below the commercial ratio, so that additional tonnage had to be employed in order to carry the same number of slaves as formerly.

Whilst the major fluctuations in the level of activity between



1772 and 1807 are clearly attributable to war, the graph also displays quite marked annual fluctuations. A range of factors lay behind these annual variations in activity, of which economic conditions in England, the state of supply of and demand for slaves on the West African coast, and the incidence of hurricane damage and slave rebellions in the West Indies, were all probably important. However, yearly fluctuations in the trade to West Africa, as shown by the number of vessels and their tonnage series, sprang, in the main, from the incidence of war. This is clearly demonstrated by the considerable recession in 1776-82 during the American War of Independence. Similarly the beginning of the French Revolutionary war in 1793-4 is marked by a very sharp reduction in the level of activity.

THE SIZE OF SLAVE-SHIPS

In this section the increasing size of vessels noted previously will be examined in more detail. Table 7 shows that, in the earlier

TABLE 7 *Average tonnage of English vessels in the West Africa trade, by port of clearance, 1700-09 to 1760-69¹⁵*

<i>Years</i>	<i>Average tonnage of clearances from Liverpool</i>	<i>Average tonnage of clearances from London</i>	<i>Average tonnage of clearances from Bristol</i>
1700-09		138 ³	
1710-19		121 ³	
1720-29	69 ¹	105 ³	89 ⁴
1730-39	70-80 ¹	113 ³	95 ⁴
1740-49		106 ³	102 ⁴
1750-59		139 ³	105 ⁴
1744-67	100 ¹	142 ³	111 ³
1760-69	109 ¹	159 ³	120 ⁴

eighteenth century, the average size of vessels increased. While there was a general increase in the average size of vessels in the West African trade, those clearing from Liverpool increased on average from 69 tons to 109 tons (or 57 per cent), those from London from 138 tons to 159 tons (or 16 per cent) and those from Bristol from 89 tons to 120 tons (or 35 per cent). As a result of

the incidence of war, the overall increase was not particularly smooth. In the case of London, a significant resort to larger vessels in wartime has been noted.¹⁶

From Table 8 it can be seen that the general growth in the size of vessels in the trade between 1700 and 1769 was maintained between 1772-5 and 1798-1807.¹⁷ The average size of all vessels clearing from England to West Africa in 1772-5 was 106 tons, whilst the unadjusted average size of vessels clearing from Liverpool to West Africa in 1798-1807 was 238 tons, and similar

TABLE 8 *Unadjusted average tonnage of English vessels in the West Africa trade by port of clearance 1772-75 to 1798-1807**

Years	Average tonnage of clearances from:			
	all English ports	Liverpool	London	Bristol
1772-75	106	106	108	110
1776-82	127	129	129	113
1783-92		170	156	149
1793-97		201	184	177
1798-1807		238		

* Average figures rounded to the nearest whole number.

increases in the size of vessels from London and Bristol are also apparent. As mentioned earlier, however, this increase is more apparent than real; a new method of tonnage assessment was enforced in 1786, and tonnage figures after that date need reducing by about one-third for comparisons to be properly made.¹⁸ Thus, the average size of 238 measured tons recorded by vessels clearing to West Africa from Liverpool in 1798-1807 is likely to be the equivalent of about 160 registered tons, an increase of over 50 per cent on the average size of vessels clearing from England to West Africa in 1772-5.¹⁹ Much of this real increase took place during the American War of Independence, when the average size of vessels clearing to West Africa grew by 20 per cent (from 106 registered tons in 1772-5 to 127 registered tons in 1776-82), while during the war with France after 1792, a further increase of 18 per cent occurred in the size of Liverpool vessels in the West African trade (from 201 measured tons in 1793-7 to 238

measured tons in 1798-1807). As discussed earlier, an additional factor encouraging the use of larger vessels was the 1788 parliamentary act which restricted the number of slaves a vessel could carry. By using a larger vessel after 1788, a slaving captain could continue to carry the same number of slaves as formerly.²⁰

TABLE 9 *Tonnage distribution of slaving vessels, 1789-92*

<i>Tonnage Range</i>	<i>Clearances from:</i>			
	<i>Liverpool, London and Bristol</i>	<i>Liverpool</i>	<i>London</i>	<i>Bristol</i>
less than 99	66 (11.6)*	33 (8.6)	19 (17.6)	14 (17.9)
100-199	306 (53.9)	217 (57.0)	52 (48.2)	37 (47.4)
200-299	133 (23.5)	88 (23.0)	32 (29.7)	13 (16.7)
300-399	48 (8.4)	37 (9.7)	1 (0.9)	10 (12.4)
more than 400	14 (2.5)	6 (1.6)	4 (3.7)	4 (1.3)
Total number of vessels	567	381	108	78
Average tonnage	185.9	190.0	177.8	183.6

* The figures in brackets are the percentage of vessels in each column occurring in each tonnage range.

For certain years, it is possible to show the tonnage distribution of vessels in the West African slave trade. Table 9 shows this specifically for slaving vessels clearing from the ports of Liverpool, London and Bristol between 1789 and 1792.²¹ It will be seen that the average tonnage of the total of 567 was 186 tons. 54 per cent of the vessels were between 100 and 199 tons in size, 11.6 per cent below 100 tons, whilst 34 per cent were greater than 200 tons. There was little variation in the average size or the frequency distribution of vessels clearing from the three ports.

SIZE OF VESSEL AND INTER-REGIONAL TRADING VARIATIONS

Both contemporary and modern evidence indicates that the size of slaving vessels trading in West Africa tended to show some

regional variation.²² James Jones, a prominent slave-trader, noted in 1788 that slaving vessels trading in the Niger Delta were 200–250 tons or more compared with the vessels of 100–200 tons typical in the Sierra Leone region.²³ As Table 10 shows, the

TABLE 10 *Tonnage of English slaving vessels in West Africa, 1790–97²⁴*

Tonnage Range	Frequency of the tonnage of slaving vessels in:					
	West Africa	Gambia	Sierra Leone	Gold Coast	Niger Delta	Angola
less						
than 49	11 (2.0)*	2 (10.0)	3 (3.6)	4 (3.8)	0	2 (1.8)
50–99	36 (7.0)	4 (20.0)	7 (8.4)	12 (11.5)	9 (4.6)	4 (3.6)
100–149	135 (27.0)	9 (45.0)	31 (37.2)	30 (28.8)	40 (20.4)	25 (22.8)
150–199	137 (27.0)	5 (25.0)	28 (33.6)	15 (14.4)	56 (28.6)	33 (30.0)
200–249	74 (14.3)	0	5 (6.0)	15 (14.4)	35 (17.9)	19 (17.3)
250–299	65 (12.3)	0	7 (8.4)	13 (12.5)	30 (15.3)	15 (13.7)
300–349	38 (7.5)	0	0	9 (8.6)	21 (10.7)	8 (7.3)
350–399	13 (2.5)	0	2 (2.4)	5 (4.8)	3 (1.5)	3 (2.7)
more than 400	3 (0.5)	0	0	1 (1.0)	1 (0.5)	1 (0.9)
Total number of vessels	512	20	83	104	195	110
Average tonnage	190.6	114.7	157.2	191.2	207.5	198.0

* The figures in brackets are the percentage of vessels in each column occurring in each tonnage range.

average size of slaving vessels trading in West Africa between 1790 and 1797 was 191 tons, and although the range was from less than 49 tons to over 400 tons, over 80 per cent of these vessels were between 100 and 299 tons. Broadly speaking, the size of slaving vessels within each region shows a similar range, although some variation is apparent. The average size of slaving vessels in Gambia was 115 tons; 70 per cent of these were between 100 tons and 199 tons and no vessels of greater than 199 tons were recorded. In Sierra Leone, the average size was 157 tons, and 71

per cent were between 100 tons and 199 tons, with 17 per cent greater than 199 tons. In the remaining regions of the Gold Coast, Niger Delta and Angola, the size of slaving vessels tended to be much greater. On the Gold Coast the average size was 191 tons, and 70 per cent of these were between 100 and 299 tons. In Angola, the average size was 198 tons, with 84 per cent of these vessels between 100 and 299 tons, whilst in the Niger Delta, the average size was 208 tons, with 82 per cent between 100 and 299 tons. These results therefore generally confirm other evidence on this aspect of the trade. It is clear that slaving vessels trading in the Niger Delta were one-third larger than those in Sierra Leone.

A comparison of the regional variations in the size of slaving vessels with the importance of each region as a source of slaves at this time, confirms that larger vessels concentrated their activities in the major regions, whilst smaller vessels traded more in the minor regions. Between 1790 and 1797, the Niger Delta was the major source of slaves in West Africa, supplying 38 per cent of the total number of vessels with Angola (22 per cent), the Gold Coast (20 per cent), and Sierra Leone (16 per cent) as secondary sources, and Gambia as a very minor source (4 per cent). The variation in the size of slaving vessels in each region shown in Table 10 follows this order, with the average size of slaving vessels in the Niger Delta at 208 tons, in Angola, the Gold Coast and Sierra Leone at 198 tons, 191 tons and 157 tons respectively, and in Gambia, 115 tons. However, this relationship between the importance of each region as a source of slaves and the size of slaving vessels trading there is not as precise as might be expected. For example, as Table 10 shows, despite the fact that the Niger Delta accounted for almost 40 per cent of English slaving vessels trading in West Africa between 1790 and 1797, the average size of slaving vessels trading there was 208 tons. This is only marginally greater than the average size of slaving vessels trading in the Gold Coast and Angola which accounted for about 20 per cent and 22 per cent respectively of English slaving vessels trading in West Africa at that time.

This apparent discrepancy may however be explained by the fact that geographical conditions within each region in West Africa also exerted a significant influence on the size of slaving vessels trading in each region. In Gambia, for example, the shallow Gambia River made the use of vessels of less than 150

tons imperative, whilst vessels in excess of 350 tons were in danger of running aground in the creeks and estuaries of the Niger Delta.²⁵ Further, the total length of the voyage from England to the regions of the Gold Coast, the Niger Delta and Angola and on to the West Indies, was substantially longer than that involved when trading to Gambia and Sierra Leone, and this may have encouraged the use of larger vessels to combat the increased marine hazards, including the likelihood of meeting pirates and belligerents.

UNDERSLAVING AND OVERSLAVING

As Table 11 shows, the most common loading of slaves from the 1720s to the 1780s was about 2.5 slaves per registered ton,²⁶ although the loading on larger vessels tended to be substantially

TABLE 11 *Loading of slaving vessels, 1720-87*²⁷

<i>Clearing from Liverpool, 1720-69</i>		<i>Clearing from Bristol, 1720-67</i>		<i>Arriving in Jamaica, 1784-87</i>	
<i>Tonnage Range</i>	<i>Ratio of slaves per ton</i>	<i>Tonnage Range</i>	<i>Ratio of slaves per ton</i>	<i>Tonnage Range</i>	<i>Ratio of slaves per ton</i>
26-45	3.5	30-49	2.3	below 50	3.0
46-65	2.8	50-69	2.9	50-99	2.2
66-85	2.6	70-89	2.5	100-149	3.0
86-105	2.5	90-109	2.4	150-199	2.5
106-125	2.4	110-129	2.5	200-299	2.0
126-145	2.3	130-149	1.9	over 300	1.6
146-165	2.1	150-189	1.9		
166-185	1.6	190-209	1.7		
186-205	2.2				
over 205	2.2				
Total number of vessels		455	517	not given	

less. It appears, therefore, that all but the very largest vessels carried more slaves per ton than the maximum loading of 1.67 slaves per ton laid down by parliamentary legislation in 1788. However, it is to be remembered that this legislation was framed

in terms of the measured ton, which was on average only about two-thirds the size of the registered ton, the unit used in Table 11. In order to compare the data in Table 11 with the loading ratio laid down in 1788, the former needs to be reduced by about one-third. Thus, a loading of 2.5 slaves per registered ton was about the equivalent of about 1.67 slaves per measured ton, the parliamentary maximum loading. It appears from Table 11 that a loading of more than 2.5 slaves per registered ton occurred on vessels from Liverpool and Bristol of less than about 130 registered tons between the 1720s and the 1760s, and on vessels smaller than about 200 registered tons, amongst English slaving vessels arriving in Jamaica between 1784 and 1787. Thus it seems that before 1788 larger slaving vessels carried less than the maximum loading of 1.67 slaves per ton.

Whilst the 1788 legislation may not have been difficult to evade, contemporary and modern evidence indicates that it was largely obeyed.²⁸ If the number of slaves carried by English slaving vessels between 1790 and 1797 is plotted against the number of slaves they were permitted to carry according to the 1788 legislation, to indicate vessels which 'overslaved' and cleared with more than their legal maximum number of slaves, and vessels which 'underslaved' and purchased less than their allowed number,²⁹ then it would seem that very few English slaving vessels in the 1790s overslaved and carried more than their legal loading.³⁰ The vast majority obeyed the 1788 ruling either by carrying their legal maximum number, or by underslaving. The considerable proportion of vessels carrying their legal maximum number of slaves may be explained by three factors. First, by the 1790s if not earlier, the supply of slaves in West Africa may not have been sufficient to allow these vessels to exceed the parliamentary ratio of 1.67 slaves per ton.³¹ Secondly, as discussed above,³² the size of slaving vessels during the 1780s and 1790s was increasing, and as Table 11 indicates, larger vessels usually carried a lower loading of slaves per ton than smaller vessels. This tendency was reinforced by the 1788 legislation which applied a lower loading of slaves per ton on vessels larger than 201 tons.³³ Thirdly, English slaving merchants appear to have appreciated that a lower loading of slaves per ton facilitated the running of the vessel and tended to reduce the level of mortality amongst the slaves whilst on board.³⁴

The frequent incidence of underslaving may be explained by a variety of factors, but contemporary evidence gives reason to believe that this was especially likely to occur under two sets of circumstances. First, the captain of the vessel may have chosen or have been directed by the owners to remain in West Africa for a limited period even if this necessitated clearing with an incomplete loading of slaves. In this way, the vessel avoided a protracted delay on the coast, and the possibility of a high rate of mortality amongst the purchased slaves.³⁵ Secondly, if the market conditions in West Africa were unfavourable, the period of time required to obtain a full loading of slaves may not have been economically viable, so that the vessel was forced to clear with an incomplete loading.³⁶ Regrettably, the data available are not adequate to allow further considerations of these points.

APPENDIX I: TONNAGE OF VESSELS BEFORE AND AFTER 1786

During the eighteenth century, two different units, the registered ton and the measured ton, were used to assess the size of English vessels. The registered ton, a unit based on the actual carrying capacity of a vessel, tended to be rather larger than the measured ton, derived from a formula based on the vessel's main dimensions.³⁷ As a result, these two units tend to produce different tonnages for the same vessel. Until new legislation in 1786, measured tonnage was usually calculated on the basis of a formula laid down by parliament in 1695.³⁸ Walton, studying 90 English and colonial vessels trading in Virginia in 1725-6, and McCusker, studying five Philadelphian vessels between 1740 and 1775, both found that the transition from registered tons to measured tons inflated the tonnage of vessels by an average of more than 50 per cent.³⁹

In 1786, parliament made it compulsory for the size of English vessels to be assessed in measured tons instead of registered tons.⁴⁰ This new legislation also slightly modified the 1695 formula, but nevertheless a considerable discrepancy in the size of a vessel expressed in measured tons compared with registered tons remains. Studying 63 English vessels trading in the West Indies in 1785 and 1787, French found that the transition from registered tons to measured tons produced an average inflation of 34.1 per cent, although this tended to be rather greater amongst smaller vessels, and less amongst larger vessels.⁴¹

It is possible to study the effect of the 1786 legislation on the tonnage of 27 slaving vessels. A report published in 1789 lists the name, English port of registry and clearance, and registered tonnage, of vessels clearing for West Africa, and arriving in the West Indies respectively, between 1785 and 1788. Each of these vessels was then identified in a manuscript return in Treasury Papers which lists the name, owners, English port of clearance and size in measured tons of English slaving vessels clearing to

West Africa from Liverpool and London between 1789 and 1795, and from Bristol between 1789 and 1793. As only vessels with uncommon names were selected from the 1789 series, it is to be hoped that any errors have been kept to a minimum.⁴² Analysis of the information indicates that the transition from registered tons to measured tons produced an average increase of 54.2 per cent, although the increase ranged from 9 per cent to 184 per cent. Within this broad range some pattern is apparent. Table 12 shows the difference between registered tons and measured tons when the 27 vessels are grouped according to size.⁴³

TABLE 12 *The difference between the tonnage of 27 slaving vessels in registered tons and measured tons in various tonnage ranges*

<i>Tonnage range</i>	<i>Number of vessels</i>	<i>Tonnage in registered tons</i>	<i>Tonnage in measured tons</i>	<i>Difference</i>	<i>Percentage* increase</i>
less than 100	9	820	1654	834	101.7
101-200	14	2380	3627	1247	52.4
201-300	3	900	1253	353	39.2
301-400	1	400	405	5	1.3
Total number of vessels	27	4500	6939	2439	54.2
Average tonnage		167.7	257		

* By which measured tonnage is greater than tonnage in registered tons.

This evidence clearly suggests that the greatest increase tended to occur amongst the smallest vessels, thus confirming French's findings. The tonnage of vessels smaller than 100 registered tons virtually doubled whilst those of between 101 and 200 registered tons and 201 and 300 registered tons increased by 52.4 per cent and 39.2 per cent respectively. The one vessel of 400 registered tons increased to only 405 measured tons (or 1.25 per cent). Although the overall average increase of 54.2 per cent is considerably greater than the average of 34.1 per cent found by French, this difference can be explained by the fact that French's sample contained a greater proportion of larger vessels than this one; 36 of French's 63 vessels were larger than 201 registered tons, compared with only 4 of this sample of 27 vessels. This is very significant, for, as discussed above, the transition from registered tons to measured tons tended to produce a smaller inflation in the tonnage of larger vessels. In fact when the measured tonnage of French's sample was calculated using the percentage increase in each tonnage range derived from my own findings shown in Table 12, an average inflation of 31.7 per cent was found, only slightly less than the average inflation of 34.1 per cent found by French. This brief study therefore confirms the research of others, indicating that the transition from assessing the

size of vessels in registered tons to measured tons enforced in 1786 significantly increased the tonnage of vessels, rendering uncorrected comparisons of pre and post 1786 tonnages misleading.

APPENDIX II: NOTE ON THE SOURCES AVAILABLE

Three main sources have been used in this study. The first of these is a series from the Public Record Office, London, T 64/286. This is a detailed account of vessels clearing to West Africa from Liverpool and London between 1789 and 1795, and from Bristol between 1789 and 1793, compiled by the Customs officials of these ports, and lists the name, tonnage, owners and the English clearance and re-entry date of each vessel, as well as distinguishing between those vessels which traded in commodities, and those which purchased slaves in West Africa. It may be that this series is a complete list of clearances from Liverpool and London between 1789 and 1795, and from Bristol between 1789 and 1793, for virtually every vessel listed as trading at that time in the other sources used below is mentioned in, and accords with, this series.⁴⁴

The second main source is a report of an inquiry into the English slave trade ordered by the House of Lords in 1799 and prepared by the London Customs authorities, House of Lords Record Office, 28 July 1800, Return concerning the Slave Trade (referred to as HLRO Return).⁴⁵ This gives details of 902 voyages to West Africa by vessels from the ports of Liverpool, London and Bristol between September 1790 and December 1797. The details of clearances up to 1795 compare very closely with the totals given in the PRO T 64/286 series and those for 1796 and 1797 are similarly very full and in close agreement with a series printed by Troughton.⁴⁶ There is reason to believe, therefore, that this report may include a full list of clearances from Liverpool, London and Bristol to West Africa between September 1790 and December 1797.

Unfortunately for 563 of the total number of 902 voyages, the report does not state whether the vessels traded in slaves or commodities. However, reference to the information given in the PRO series shows that 10-20 per cent of all vessels clearing to West Africa from Liverpool, London and Bristol between 1789 and 1795 regularly traded in commodities, and so a similar proportion is probably applicable to these vessels of HLRO Return. For these 563 vessels, only the name, tonnage, port and date of clearance, and occasionally a reference to its being 'captured' or 'lost', are given. It may be that this information was derived from the Customs records of the ports of Liverpool, London and Bristol, since these details are virtually identical with those listed in the PRO series. For the remaining 339 vessels, which all traded only for slaves, the journals kept by the vessels' surgeons were available to those who compiled the report and so fuller details of the voyages were listed. As well as the vessel's name and tonnage, the following details were given: (1) the English port and date of clearance; (2) the West African place and date of entry; (3) the West African place and date of clearance; (4) the West Indian place and date of entry; (5) the West Indian place and date of clearance. It will be noted that the English port and the date of return are not given. The information on the slaves handled on each voyage, subdivided into the numbers of men and women, boys and girls, includes the following details: (1) the total number of slaves purchased; (2) the number of slaves dying

before the vessel cleared from West Africa; (3) the number of slaves relanded before the vessel cleared from West Africa; (4) the number of slaves transshipped before the vessel cleared from West Africa; (5) the number of slaves in the vessel when it cleared from West Africa; (6) the number of slaves dying during the Middle Passage from West Africa to the West Indies; (7) the number of slaves 'landed and sold' in the West Indies.

This report appears to have come to light only in recent years, so that no references to its reliability in detail are available.⁴⁷ However, details of the report accord closely with the PRO series and Troughton's data for the years 1790 to 1797. Further, as will be discussed shortly, much of the report's additional information on the chronology of the voyages and the numbers of slaves handled, agrees with the Custom-based series reprinted in *Parliamentary Papers*,⁴⁸ so the report as a whole appears reliable. A few minor clerical errors have been detected but the one main deficiency of the report is the occasional omission of voyage timing and cargo details for certain of the slaving vessels, particularly from London.

Thirdly, use has been made of the extensive evidence given by abolitionists and pro-slavers before the parliamentary inquiries into the slave trade in the late 1780s; reprinted in *Parliamentary Papers*, 1789, volumes XXIV, XXV, XXVI; 1790, XXIX, XXX, XXXI; 1792, XXXV, and 1795-96, XLII.⁴⁹ The main statistical series from this material which have been used in this dissertation are all based on Customs records and are as follows:

(1) *PP*, 1789, XXIV, No. 634, pp. 60-3. This lists the number and tonnage of vessels clearing annually from English ports to West Africa between 1772 and 1787; *PP*, 1790, XXXI, No. 705, p. 5, extends this information to 1789. As will be discussed shortly, this information accords quite closely with other *PP* series, so there is reason to believe that they can be treated as reliable. Unfortunately, *PP*, 1789, XXIV, No. 634, pp. 60-3 and 1790, XXXI, No. 705, p. 5, do not distinguish between slaving vessels and commodity traders, although the PRO series indicates that about 10-20 per cent of all English vessels clearing to West Africa between 1789 and 1792 traded consistently in commodities.⁵⁰

(2) *PP*, 1789, XXIV, No. 631, pp. 1-8. This lists the name, tonnage, crew size and date of clearance of vessels from Liverpool and Bristol to West Africa between 1785 and 1788, and would seem to be fairly complete. This series has not apparently been used before by others, and although it agrees closely with *PP*, 1789, XXIV, No. 634, pp. 60-3 and 1790, XXXI, No. 705, p. 5, all three series were compiled by the Registrar General of Shipping and may all be derived from the same data. However, although the reliability of this series is not clear, its information has proved useful in studying the size of vessels in the West African trade, and their pattern of clearance from England.

(3) *PP*, 1795-6, XLII, No. 849, pp. 1-10. This lists for 320 slaving voyages in 1789 and 1791-5, the name, tonnage, West African trading location, the number of slaves purchased and the mortality amongst the slaves before they reached the West Indies together with the number landed in the West Indies. Although apparently not studied before, the series seems reliable. Almost all of the voyages can be cross-checked and verified by the PRO series and the material in HLRO Return. The absence of any information for the year 1790 is regrettable, but the series as a

whole usefully augments the number of vessels available for the study of several aspects of the slave trade.

(4) *PP*, 1789, XXIV, No. 629, pp. 1-6 is derived from Customs records and lists English vessels arriving in the West Indies from West Africa, between 1785 and 1787, together with their name, tonnage, crew size and date and place of registry. Although apparently not used by others, these details show general accordance with other *PP* series. Additional details of the slave trade in the West Indies are given in *PP*, 1792, XXXV, No. 767, pp. 1-7. This lists slaving vessels entering the West Indies annually between 1789 and 1791, giving the following details of the vessels; their name, tonnage, West African trading location, West Indian market and the number of slaves landed there. Practically all of the vessels listed here can be traced in the *PRO* series and *HLRO* Return, so the series can be considered fairly complete, the only weakness being the frequent omission of the West African trading location. In a synopsis at the end of *PP*, 1792, XXXV, No. 767, pp. 1-7, details of the annual total number of slaves imported, exported and retained by each island between 1789 and 1791 are given. A series reprinted in *PP*, 1790, XXXI, No. 705, p. 7, extends this information for the years 1787 and 1788, and together these series seem to give a reliable and comprehensive picture of the state of the West Indian markets between 1787 and 1791. Their information agrees closely with the tonnage involved in the West African trade listed in *PP*, 1789, XXIV, No. 634, pp. 60-3 and the *PRO* series and the market structure of the West Indies depicted by *HLRO* Return.⁶¹

Finally, information on the numbers and tonnage of vessels annually clearing from Liverpool to West Africa between 1798 and 1807, and the numbers annually clearing from London and Bristol between 1798 and 1804, has been obtained from Troughton.⁶² His series begins in 1795 and it agrees closely with the information provided by *HL* Main Papers for 1795-7. The source of Troughton's information is not known, but the statistics and their tabulation suggest that they were derived from Customs records, although they do not distinguish between commodity traders and slaving vessels. However, by this last decade of the English slave trade, the proportion of commodity vessels was probably substantially less than the 10-20 per cent found between 1789 and 1795.⁶³

NOTES

- 1 This paper is based on material taken from my unpublished dissertation 'The English Atlantic slave trade in its final phase from the early 1770s to 1807', M.A. part requirement, Exeter, 1974. I am much indebted to Professor W. E. Minchinton and Dr H. E. S. Fisher for their advice and guidance during the period of preparation of the dissertation; and to Professor R. T. Anstey, who immediately made known to other scholars his discovery of the House of Lords lists, one of my primary sources.
- 2 The data used in Table 1 and several other tables in this article are based on the clearances of all vessels from England to West Africa, and thus include those vessels which did not trade for slaves. However, commodity traders usually accounted for only a small proportion of all vessels clearing to West Africa, so that this information provides a

- not inaccurate indication of the level of activity in the slave trade. See above, p. 107. For a description of the statistical sources, see Appendix II.
- 3 Sources of Table 1: (1710) *Calendar of State Papers, American and West Indies, 1710-11*, No. 544; (1725) Public Record Office, CO 388/25; (1730-39, 1750-59) PRO Adm 7/79-92; (1771) Bryan Edwards, *The history, civil and commercial, of the British colonies in the West Indies*, 2 vols. (1794), 2, p. 65.
 - 4 Sources of Table 2: (1772-88) *Parliamentary Papers* (henceforth PP) 1789, XXIV, No. 634, pp. 60-3; 1790, XXXI, No. 705, p. 5; (1789-97) PRO T 64/286; House of Lords Record Office 28.7.1800, Return concerning the Slave Trade (hereafter HLRO Return); (1798-1807) Thomas Troughton, *The history of Liverpool* (Liverpool, 1810), p. 265. Fuller details of clearances to West Africa between 1772 and 1807 are given in Appendix I of my dissertation.
 - 5 It appears that London merely withdrew from the shipping of slaves and retained an important financial interest in the trade. See Richard B. Sheridan, 'The commercial and financial organisation of the British slave trade 1750-1807', *EcHR* n.s. 2 (1958-9), pp. 249-63.
 - 6 Sources of Table 3: PRO T 64/286; HLRO Return.
 - 7 Sources of Table 4: PRO T 64/286; HLRO Return.
 - 8 Curtin found that 95.3 per cent of vessels clearing from Liverpool to West Africa in the period 1783-93 were slaving vessels, see Philip D. Curtin, *The Atlantic slave trade, a census* (Madison, 1969), p. 134.
 - 9 Sources: as Table 2. For fuller details of the tonnage of vessels clearing annually to West Africa from 1772-1807 see my dissertation, pp. 5-6.
 - 10 Sources of Table 6: PRO T 64/286; HLRO Return.
 - 11 The question of the eighteenth-century shipping tonnage measurement has received considerable study recently. This research clearly indicates that the transition from registered tons to measured tons produced something of the order of a 50 per cent inflation in the tonnage of vessels. My own study, based solely on vessels in the slave trade, closely agrees with this and is given in detail in Appendix I.
 - 12 The amount of growth may have been considerably more than 1,000 registered tons. As shown in Table 4, until the sudden decline of the African trades of London and Bristol after 1793, slaving vessels accounted for about 80 per cent of all clearances from Liverpool, London and Bristol to West Africa, whilst considerably less than 5 per cent of clearances from Liverpool in the 1790s were commodity traders. Thus the tonnage of slaving vessels clearing annually to West Africa in 1772-5 is likely to have been significantly less than 17,083 registered tons, whilst over 95 per cent of the equivalent of 18,000 registered tons clearing annually from Liverpool in 1798-1807 was in the slave trade.
 - 13 See above, pp. 99-100.
 - 14 Elizabeth Donnan, *Documents illustrative of the history of the slave trade to America*, 4 vols. (Washington, 1930) 2, pp. 582-9. Although a slightly greater loading was allowed where a large proportion of the vessels' slaves were less than 4 feet 4 inches high, it appears that none of the vessels listed in HLRO Return utilised this qualification.
 - 15 Sources of Table 7: (1) John J. Gould, 'Liverpool and the West African slave trade from 1720 to 1769', University of Exeter M.A. dissertation (1972), p. 46; (2) Roger Dancey, 'Shipping in the Jamaica slave trade,

- 1686-1807', University of Exeter M.A. dissertation (1971), p. 22; (3) Christopher French, 'The role of London in the Atlantic slave trade, 1680-1776', University of Exeter M.A. dissertation (1970), p. 11; (4) Gareth Rees, 'The slave trade of Bristol in the eighteenth century - a study of Bristol slave vessels in colonial ports, 1710-69', University of Exeter M.A. dissertation (1970), p. 8. All four dissertations are based on Naval Office Shipping Lists.
- 16 French, 'London slave trade', *op. cit.*, p. 11.
- 17 Sources of Table 8 as Table 2. For fuller details of the size of vessels in the West Africa Trade between 1772 and 1807, see my dissertation, Appendix IV.
- 18 See Appendix I.
- 19 Using Naval Office Shipping Lists, Hobbs found that the average size of English slaving vessels in Jamaica increased from 169 tons in 1784-93 to 266 tons in 1804-8; Philip Hobbs, 'The slave trade to the British West Indies, 1784-1808', University of Exeter M.A. dissertation (1971), p. 13.
- 20 See above, p. 96.
- 21 Source of Table 9: PRO T 64/286. For fuller details of the tonnage distribution of English slaving vessels in the period 1789-92, see Appendix VI of my dissertation.
- 22 To facilitate closer examination of the English trade with the West African coast, the whole area has been divided into five regions, each of which demonstrates considerable unity in its relief, climate, vegetation and the character of its slave trade. These regions are (1) Gambia; (2) Sierra Leone, from the Bissagos Islands to Cape Palmas; (3) Gold Coast, from Cape Palmas to the Ogun River; (4) Niger Delta, from the Ogun River to Cape Lopez; and (5) Angola, from Cape Lopez to Cape Frio.
- 23 Donnan, *Documents*, *op. cit.*, 2, pp. 589-90.
- 24 Sources of Table 10: *PP*, 1792, XXXV, No. 767, pp. 1-7; XLII, 1795-6, No. 849, pp. 1-10; HLRO Return.
- 25 *PP*, 1790, XXIX, No. 698, p. 589, evidence of Falconbridge; Hugh Crow, *Memoirs of Captain Crow* (1830), pp. 63-5.
- 26 This ratio is obtained by dividing the number of slaves a vessel carried by the size of the vessel in tons. A 150-ton vessel carrying 300 slaves therefore has an average ratio of slaves per ton of 2.0.
- 27 Sources of Table 11: Gould, 'Liverpool slave trade', *op. cit.*, pp. 22-3; Rees, 'Bristol slave trade 1710-69', *op. cit.*, p. 30; Dancy, 'Slave trade to Jamaica', *op. cit.*, p. 35.
- 28 Edwards, *British colonies in the West Indies*, *op. cit.*, 2, pp. 122-4; Curtin, *Census*, *op. cit.*, p. 135 and note.
- 29 See Graph 25 in my dissertation.
- 30 It is possible that on the minority of vessels which appear to have overslaved, some of the slaves may have been less than 4 feet 4 inches high. When smaller slaves formed a substantial proportion of the total cargo, the 1788 legislation allowed a slightly greater loading than 1.67 slaves per ton. However, details of the cargoes indicate that the numbers of smaller slaves on these vessels were not of significant proportions.
- 31 *PP*, 1789, XXIV, No. 633, p. 48, evidence of Tarleton; *PP*, 1789, XXVI, No. 646a, part I, evidence of Newton; French, 'London slave trade', *op. cit.*, pp. 42-3.

- 32 See above, pp. 98-100.
- 33 See above, p. 96.
- 34 *PP*, 1789, XXVI, No. 646a, part II, p. 13, evidence of Bowen.
- 35 *PP*, 1789, XXVI, No. 646a, part I, evidence of Newton; *PP*, 1789, XXIV, No. 633, p. 32, evidence of Dalzel.
- 36 *PP*, 1789, XXIV, No. 633, pp. 43-4, evidence of Jones.
- 37 Ralph Davis, *The rise of the English shipping industry in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries* (1962), p. 7.
- 38 6 and 7 W. and M. c. 12. IX.
- 39 Gary M. Walton, 'Colonial tonnages - a note', *J.Econ. Hist.*, 27 (1967), pp. 392-7; John J. McCusker, 'Colonial tonnage measurement: Five Philadelphia merchant ships as an example,' *ibid.*, pp. 82-91.
- 40 26 Geo. III c. 60.
- 41 Christopher J. French, 'Eighteenth century shipping tonnage measurements', *J.Econ. Hist.*, 33 (1973), pp. 434-44.
- 42 For the detailed list of these vessels' average tonnages, see my dissertation, p. 90.
- 43 Sources of Table 12: *PP*, 1789, XXIV, No. 629, pp. 1-6 and No. 631, pp. 1-8; PRO T 64/286.
- 44 The series shows that there were substantial clearances of slaving and commodity vessels to West Africa in 1794. Until now, this information has been absent, and Curtin has interpreted this as indicating a complete cessation of the trade: Curtin, *Census*, *op. cit.*, pp. 154-5.
- 45 The return is noted in R. Anstey, *The Atlantic slave trade and British abolition, 1760-1810* (1975), p. 427.
- 46 Troughton, *History of Liverpool*, *op. cit.*, p. 265.
- 47 The shorter list is Anstey's 'Lords A' list, and the larger one his 'Lords B' list: Anstey, *Atlantic slave trade*, *op. cit.*, p. 427.
- 48 *PP*, 1792, XXXV, No. 767, pp. 1-7; 1795-96, XLII, No. 849, pp. 1-10.
- 49 This source has often been referred to in earlier studies of the trade.
- 50 *PP*, 1789, XXIV, No. 634, pp. 60-3 and 1790, XXXI, No. 705, p. 5, have been reprinted in several established works, though without reference to their reliability; see, for example, Troughton, *Liverpool*, *op. cit.*, p. 265; Gomer Williams, *A history of Liverpool privateers and letters of marque with an account of the Liverpool slave trade* (1897), p. 678.
- 51 Part of *BPP*, 1792, XXXV, No. 767, pp. 1-7 and 1790 XXXI, No. 705, p. 7, were reprinted in Edwards, *British colonies*, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 241-2.
- 52 Troughton, *Liverpool*, *op. cit.*, p. 265, reprinted in Williams, *Liverpool privateers*, *op. cit.*, p. 679.
- 53 See above, pp. 93-4.

Slave mortality on British ships 1791-1797

HERBERT S. KLEIN and STANLEY L. ENGERMAN

By the last decade of the eighteenth century, Liverpool stood at the preeminent position as the leading slave-trading port of Great Britain. It had achieved this position within the space of just fifty years, and had succeeded in replacing Bristol and London as England's most active trading region, accounting for over two-thirds of all slave shipping.¹ The growth of that trade has been well studied by several scholars and the critical position of Liverpool has been long recognised.² But what has still remained relatively obscure has been the actual dynamics of the slave trade itself, and the movement of the slaves and ships in time and space. In particular, little has been known about the last years of the trade and about the impact of the various acts of parliament which attempted to regulate the general conditions aboard the slave-trading vessels and slave mortality in transit during this period. Aspects of the trade of these years are studied in other essays in this volume, and the present paper concentrates on one issue, that of the magnitude of slave mortality. The paper is based on a preliminary quantitative analysis of a unique collection of materials gathered together by the House of Lords as background for Parliament's various slave trade reform acts. This material was first systematically studied by Roger Anstey,³ and it was through his kind intervention that we were made aware of its existence.

Our major source, the 'Return to an Order of the Right Honorable the House of Lords dated the 10th of July 1799, directing that the clerk of the Parliaments do cause to be extracted from the several log books and Journals of Ships employed in the Slave Trade in each year 1791 to 1797...', dated 28 July

1800, is based upon the log-books and surgeon's journals of about 350 ships, carrying about 100,000 slaves. This source (Anstey's Lords List A) is described in more detail elsewhere in this volume.⁴ The categories of information are not always complete for each voyage, but the data are in general sufficiently complete for this list to be a vital source in building up a picture of the British contribution to the Atlantic slave trade at the end of the eighteenth century.⁵ In this article, the information in the list is supplemented⁶ by the information on African ports of departure contained in other House of Lords documents, and by a listing of ships arriving in the British West Indies between 1789 and 1795 published in the *Parliamentary Papers*.⁷ While that list also details a vessel's name, tonnage, the number of slaves taken on board, died in passage, and arrived in the West Indies, and includes most of the ships in Lords List A, only the information on African ports was utilised (Lords List A frequently fails to report this important item of information).⁸ The two lists will need to be checked item by item for a final reconciliation, but summary calculations on each relating to average tonnage, slaves carried, slaves per ton, and mortality, produce consistent results, both in aggregate and by coastal breakdown, thus encouraging us to rely on the more complete of these sources.⁹ In addition, because of the need to obtain data on a longer time period to permit discussion of the impact of Dolben's Act on the trade, data from the Naval Lists in the Public Record Office for the major receiving area (Jamaica) were used for the period 1782-1808.¹⁰ In this article we present preliminary analyses of these data in relation to a limited number of points at issue; we hope to provide a more complete examination in another study.

SLAVE MORTALITY IN RELATION TO THE PATTERNS OF TRADE

By the last decade of the eighteenth century Liverpool was the major slave-trading port in the British Isles. It accounted for about three-quarters of the clearings of ships listed, with Bristol and London accounting for only about 16 per cent and 11 per cent respectively. There were some differences in the ports of Africa visited, few London-based ships visiting the region below the Gold Coast, and few from Bristol reaching the Congo-Angola area. Jamaica was the major recipient of slaves carried in British

ships in this period (see Table 1), and was so for ships from each of the ports. Some differences also occurred in the West Indies ports employed; for example, St Vincent was less important for Liverpool ships than it was for the ships from the other ports. It should be remembered, however, that though Liverpool's contribution was of outstanding importance for the slave trade, the slave trade was considerably less important for Liverpool. Thus, in the period 1785-7 (for instance) the clearings to Africa accounted for less than 10 per cent of outbound tonnage from Liverpool, less, that is, than the tonnage in the direct trade from Liverpool to the British West Indies; and the total of both trades was equal to only about one-fifth of all clearings (exclusive of coastal trade).¹¹

TABLE 1 *Number of British ships* and of slaves shipped thereon, by African and New World ports, 1791-1797†*

<i>African Areas</i>	<i>New World Ports</i>							
	<i>Jamaica</i>		<i>Grenada</i>		<i>St Vincent</i>		<i>Other</i>	
	<i>Ships</i>	<i>Slaves</i>	<i>Ships</i>	<i>Slaves</i>	<i>Ships</i>	<i>Slaves</i>	<i>Ships</i>	<i>Slaves</i>
Senegambia	1	194	2	419	2	371	1	121
Sierra Leone	21	5702	4	923	5	822	11	2634
Windward Coast	10	3579	3	601	4	895	2	217
Gold Coast	10	2854	—	—	9	2015	12	3920
Bight of Benin	1	317	—	—	1	195	1	350
Bight of Biafra	63	20677	23	4902	9	2985	22	6320
Congo-Angola	40	12727	8	2267	1	173	20	5908
Unknown	41	13426	3	598	9	2237	8	2327
Total	187	59476	43	9710	40	9693	77	21797

* The unit of one ship in this and following tables is of course, strictly, one voyage of a single ship. Many ships made repeated voyages during the period.

† There were 12 ships for which no number of slaves arrived was given, but which are included in the ship totals here. While these omissions will not affect the general patterns shown, it does mean that slaves per ship cannot be computed from the data in this table.

Table 1 presents some details of the pattern of the slave trade between the major African slave-providing areas and the British West Indies. As indicated, the major shipping areas were the Bight of Biafra and the Congo-Angola area. Within the time period covered, the latter area was increasing in relative importance.¹² As discussed below, this shift in the African supply area had a significant impact upon both the rate of mortality and the sex ratios. Jamaica was the major receiving area in the British West Indies, followed by Grenada and St Vincent. The most important of the other islands were Barbados (16 voyages) and Dominica (15 voyages), and there were several voyages each to Havana, Trinidad, Tobago, Martinique, St Croix, and Demerara. Jamaica not only received the most slaves and voyages, its ships were larger and carried more slaves per voyage than those of any of the other major receiving areas.¹³

TABLE 2 *Average length of voyage from England to Africa, time spent on coast, and length of voyage to the West Indies, by African areas, 1791-1797*

	<i>To Africa</i>		<i>On Coast</i>		<i>To West Indies</i>	
	<i>Ships</i>	<i>Days</i>	<i>Ships</i>	<i>Days</i>	<i>Ships</i>	<i>Days</i>
Senegambia	5	64.2	6	71.5	6	28.3
Sierra Leone	41	74.0	41	158.5	41	45.2
Windward Coast	19	67.5	18	175.7	19	52.6
Gold Coast	30	81.1	30	130.9	31	55.1
Bight of Benin	3	100.3	3	81.0	3	62.3
Bight of Biafra	111	75.4	113	99.9	116	60.4
Congo-Angola	67	106.0	69	95.2	69	56.0
Unknown	55	99.5	57	111.7	61	57.3
Total	331	85.6	337	114.2	346	55.7

The House of Lords data also provide detailed information on the sailing time from England to Africa, the length of time spent on the African coast, and the sailing time in the 'middle passage' from Africa to the West Indies (see Table 2).¹⁴ While the sailing times from England show little variation on average in relation to the home ports there are important differences in duration of voyage to the African ports, differences which seem primarily

related to the distances from England. But trading and supply features primarily determined the sharp differences in the time spent by the ships in obtaining their slaves at various points along the African coast. While the crew mortality apparently varied with length of time on the coast, there is no clear relationship between slave mortality in the 'middle passage' and average time on the coast.¹⁵ Nor is there a clear relationship, among African areas, between the number of slaves shipped, or the number of ships, and the time spent on the coast. Variations in voyage duration to the West Indies were not large (disregarding the few voyages from Senegambia), and were affected somewhat by the specific islands to which shipments went. Thus it took about two weeks longer, on average, for ships to reach Jamaica than to reach the islands of Grenada and Dominica, and a few days longer to reach those islands than to reach St Vincent. Nevertheless there seems to be no relationship between the average sailing time from African ports to the West Indies and the average mortality rates in the 'middle passage'. The higher death rates from the Bight of Biafra discussed below are not explained by either a longer 'middle passage', or by a longer time on the African coast.¹⁶

In examining the relationship between mortality and the African originating areas (see Table 3) some interesting variations occur. While the overall average mortality per ship was about 5.7 per cent, the distribution of mortality rates was highly skewed, the median mortality rate being about 3 per cent. An indication of this skewness is that (even when one omits ships recording zero mortality) about one-half of the ships were eligible for the special bonuses of £50 for masters and £25 for surgeons provided by Dolben's Act, for vessels achieving mortality rates under 3 per cent; while about 40 per cent were eligible for the larger bonuses for mortality rates under 2 per cent. Mortality rates show a pronounced variation among African ports, with the mortality rates for shipments from Bight of Biafra being more than twice those of the other ports of this period.¹⁷ The causes of this difference must relate to the nature of the African supply source, since none of the variables normally used to explain mortality differentials had sufficient impact to create the difference. That is, differences in average time on the coast and in average sailing time are inadequate to account for mortality differences. For certain areas

mortality rose with sailing time, though the rise was less steep than in the mortality of the Portuguese slave trade of a later period, where a sharp increment occurred after a certain length of voyage.¹⁸ However, the distributions of ships by sailing time provide no major explanation of death rate differentials among

TABLE 3 *Slave mortality rates on British ships, and percentage male of slaves shipped, by African areas, 1791-1797*

	<i>Average Mortality Rate*</i> %	<i>Percentage Male</i> %
Senegambia	2.91	67.8
Sierra Leone	3.71	65.9
Windward Coast	3.56	65.5
Gold Coast	2.75	65.1
Bight of Benin	4.30	61.1
Bight of Biafra	10.56	56.6
Congo-Angola	3.65	65.4
Unknown	1.56	63.5
Total	5.65	62.3

* Average of mortality rates per ship. Ships with no recorded deaths omitted.

African areas. Further, the pattern of mortality rates cannot be explained either by ships' tonnage, or by the number of slaves carried per ton. The pattern of fewer slaves per ton as tonnage increased, noticed in ships prior to the operation of Dolben's Act (which permitted larger ratios of slaves per ton on smaller ships), can be still observed. However, for this series, the death rates were higher on ships with smaller numbers of slaves per ton, a point we shall return to in discussing the impact of Dolben's Act.¹⁹ Marked differences in mortality rates among African ports persisted, and though there was a steep decline over time in the aggregate death rate, as noted by Anstey, this reflected in some measure not only declining mortality along certain routes but also the shifting pattern of the British slave trade.

In examining the material on the sex composition of slaves shipped from Africa (Table 3, column 2), the pattern in the late-eighteenth-century slave trade was consistent with the pattern

found in the Atlantic slave trade for other nations and other periods, with over 62 per cent of slaves shipped being male. Yet it is interesting to note that there are some differences among African ports, with the percentage for the Bight of Biafra falling below 57 per cent. There were no differences of this magnitude in the sex ratio of slaves arriving in each of the West Indies islands, even though these were at different stages of development.²⁰ It should be noted, however, that arrivals in Cuba in the period 1790-1820 were about 70 per cent male, although the slaves probably included imports from the West Indies as well as from Africa.²¹ For about one-half of the listed British ships there were separate counts of boys and girls (children being defined by the 4' 4" dividing line of the Act), and on these vessels children amounted to about 13 per cent of total slaves shipped, with a sex ratio similar to that for adults. The ratio of children to adults did not vary much among African export areas, with the exception of Sierra Leone, for which the share of slave children was 20 per cent. While there seems to have been no difference between the death rates for adult males and for adult females in the 'middle passage', the death rate for children exceeded the adult rate by a considerable margin.²² Thus, again, the differences in sex ratios and in child-adult ratio among African ports indicate the need for more detailed study of the African slave-supply patterns in specific areas.

LEGISLATION AND SLAVE MORTALITY

The material in the Lords Return, in conjunction with material from the Naval Lists for Jamaica, permits some analysis of the impact of certain of the acts regulating the slave trade. Two major acts were passed, in 1788 and 1799. The first, Dolben's Act, regulated capacity by fixing a ratio of five slaves per three tons up to 200 tons, and then one slave per additional ton thereafter.²³ The 1799 act regulated carrying capacity in relation to the physical dimensions of the vessels, not to their tonnage, and unfortunately the accessible material does not provide the data to compute this capacity.²⁴ Both acts were apparently intended by their authors to reduce slave mortality by relieving what they assumed were dangerously overcrowded conditions.²⁵ By using the tonnage data for these ships we can make some analysis of

the laws' impact upon the slave trade and up to a point determine whether the aims of the authors were achieved.

It is important to distinguish two issues. The first of these is the impact of legislation on the number of slaves carried in each ship and upon the size of ships involved in the trade. The second is the consequent impact upon mortality in the slave trade, as assumed to follow by the supporters of the legislation. Because the period under study, 1791-7, is too brief to detect long-term trends, and because we lack comparable detailed knowledge of shipping patterns and mortality rates in the period before the act of 1788, we can only approach these issues obliquely. However, two points arising from the House of Lords data, (a) the inverse relationship of slaves per ton and death rates (which itself raises doubts about the positive impact of the legislative requirements on slave trade mortality), and (b) the effect of shifts in the pattern of African supply areas on mortality, accounting for some of the decline, both make it seem doubtful whether marked trends in slave mortality can be attributed significantly to the legislation. A further general point is that, despite the known effect upon slaves carried per ship and the expressed fears of the slave traders, we cannot fully gauge the impact of the legislation on slave-trading profitability until we know more than is presently known about the elasticities of slave supply and demand in Africa and the New World; and not knowing the range of forces behind the prices paid for slaves in the West Indies and in Africa, we cannot determine the rational economic reaction of the traders to the new laws.

Since the House of Lords data are for years in which Dolben's Act was already the legal constraint, they tell us little about the effect of the law. But they do show that the average ratio of slaves carried to the number allowed by the law was about 90 per cent, and this figure varied little by tonnage. Over half the ships were below the 200-ton limit, but after 1796 there was a marked movement to larger ships. However, by using the Jamaica shipping lists (Table 4), it is possible to say rather more about the impact of legislation. Unfortunately there are gaps in the data, so that the greater part of the period affected by Dolben's Act is not covered. A further difficulty is our uncertainty as to the effect of the changes in measurement of ship's tonnage introduced in 1786 upon these comparisons.²⁰ Finally, the shipping lists figures are

for numbers of slaves arrived, not numbers shipped, and an adjustment for mortality needs to be made for strict comparison with the Act's provisions. Nevertheless, despite these snags, the trends are quite clear. Between the 1780s and the 1800s, there was a sharp drop in slaves per ton, and the numbers carried per ship declined sharply. If we assume that no adjustment for changes in tonnage measurement after 1786 is necessary, then the

TABLE 4 *Slave ratios on British ships arriving in Jamaica 1782-1808*

<i>Years</i>	<i>Number of Ships</i>	<i>Average Tonnage*</i>	<i>Average Slaves per Ton†</i>	<i>Average Capacity Ratio†*</i>
1782-87	122	167.3	2.64	1.616
1796-98	36	259.9	1.48	.975
1802-08	198	287.0	0.99	.664

* For tonnage before and after 1786, see notes 26 and 27. Capacity is measured by the 1788 regulations.

† Averages calculated from the ratios for individual ships. Because of the inverse relationship of tonnage and slaves per ton, these averages are higher than the estimates of others calculated by dividing the total number of slaves by total tonnage.

larger decline in slaves carried per ton followed the first act, although the second also had an important effect. On this assumption, Dolben's Act reduced slaves per ton by about 44 per cent and the 1799 act by another 33 per cent.²⁷ There was also a sharp rise in the size of slave-ships in the 1790s. Thus a clear impact of the regulating laws on the slaves carried per vessel can be seen. But the impact on mortality, and on profits, calls for further detailed investigation.

CONCLUSIONS

In this preliminary examination of the House of Lords lists we have attempted to discuss the geographical patterns of the British slave trade in the late eighteenth century, slave mortality in the 'middle passage' and its causes, and the impact of parliamentary regulatory acts on that mortality. Given the incompleteness of some of the data in both the Lords Return and in the materials

available in *Parliamentary Papers* and at the Public Record Office, we cannot fully determine all the connections posited between mortality, overcrowding, African supply conditions, and other factors. Such a more detailed analysis we hope to undertake in future studies. But the quantitative material we have analysed at this time does permit us to make some tentative conclusions that we feel will be supported by further research. First of all, it is evident that while contemporary critiques considered overcrowding to be the primary cause of mortality in the middle passage, this cannot have been the case. Thus the British regulatory legislation, while it did have an impact on determining ratios of slaves per ton and on slaves carried, may have had little impact on mortality. Equally, it would appear that because of inherent space limitations, there was a consistent decline of slaves per ton as tonnage of vessels increased in size, even prior to formal legislation. Thus the parliamentary acts may have encoded more common space standards already in existence among the slavers prior to the act. Nevertheless, the increase in the size of slave-ships in the later period of the trade, which produced both a rising average tonnage and a declining ratio of slaves per ton, may have reflected wider trends in the pattern of the trade (e.g. geographical shifts) which were themselves encouraged by the regulatory acts.

Apart from the impact of the parliamentary regulations, the House of Lords material has also revealed the importance of African regional origins in determining both overall mortality and the sexual composition of the forced migrants. Clearly the Bight of Biafra was a unique area by contemporary African standards, in terms both of higher mortality in transit to the New World and of the greater percentage of females exported. This finding seems to reinforce recent studies in other Atlantic slave trades which indicate the importance of local African conditions in determining the composition and health of the arriving slaves.

NOTES

Financial assistance was provided for this research by the Computing Center, Columbia University, and by the National Science Foundation of the U.S.A.

- 1 Gomer Williams, *History of the Liverpool Privateers* . . . (Liverpool, 1897), pp. 469-95; Roger Anstey, 'The volume and profitability of the

- British slave trade, 1761-1807', Stanley L. Engerman and Eugene D. Genovese (eds.), *Race and slavery in the western hemisphere: quantitative studies* (Princeton, 1975), pp. 3-12, 31.
- 2 For a bibliographic guide see F. E. Sanderson, 'Bibliographical Essay: Liverpool and the slave trade: a guide to sources', *THSLC*, 124 (1973), pp. 154-76.
 - 3 Roger Anstey, *The Atlantic slave trade and British abolition, 1760-1810* (1975) and Anstey, 'Volume', *op. cit.* There is some overlap between chapters one and two of Anstey's book and the essay, and in these cases only the citation to the latter source is used.
 - 4 See pp. 106-7. The Return, which includes a longer but less detailed list (Anstey's List B), is in the House of Lords Record Office, at shelf location 5/J/11/2, 'Slave Trade Accounts'. The Return is hereafter termed Lords Return in the text and HLRO Return in the notes.
 - 5 Extensive use has been made of the list in D. P. Lamb, 'The English Atlantic slave trade in its final phase from the early 1770s to 1807', unpublished M.A. dissertation, University of Exeter, 1974; we are indebted to Professor W. E. Minchinton for bringing this work to our notice. Our own analysis to some extent parallels that in Lamb, though ours was done independently, and we draw attention in following notes to comparable material and conclusions in Lamb.
 - 6 The proportion of ships in Lords List A to all British ships clearing for the slave trade in 1791-7 is about 40 per cent, Anstey, 'Volume', *op. cit.*, pp. 7-10. Since we suppose that the lists were restricted primarily to those ships taking slaves to British possessions, they cannot be used to discuss British slave shipments to possessions of other European powers; and List A must be regarded as referring only to a sample of British ships taking slaves mainly to British possessions.
 - 7 See *Parliamentary Papers, Accounts and Papers*, 1795/6 XLII (849), 'An Account of all Cargoes of Negroes imported into the British West Indies'; and HLRO, Papers, 19 June 1799, 25 June 1799 and 9 July 1799.
 - 8 The lists were combined for African ports only when the match-up of tonnage and slaves was perfect. In doing so the number of ships with African port unknown was reduced from 104 to 61. This made for no changes in the patterns observed when only the data contained in HLRO Return were utilised.
 - 9 See Anstey, 'Volume', *op. cit.*, pp. 25-6, for a discussion of the patterns of mortality rates.
 - 10 Public Record Office, CO 142/19-25.
 - 11 *PP, Accounts and Papers*, 1789, XXVI (646), 'Sundry papers on the slave trade', Part IV, No. 3, Mr. Norris' supplements to the account of the trade of Liverpool.
 - 12 According to data in Williams, *Liverpool Privateers*, *op. cit.*, pp. 681-5, this shift continued for those ships sailing from Liverpool in 1798 [See Drake, below, pp. 143-5. Eds.].
 - 13 Ships to Jamaica averaged 226.2 tons (those for other ports only 189.3 tons) and carried 326.8 slaves (those for other ports carried only 269.3 slaves).
 - 14 Table 2 may be compared with the following results of a separate analysis of HLRO Return and other records in Lamb, 'English Atlantic slave trade', *op. cit.*, Tables 15-16 (duration to Africa of 331 voyages, 1790-7, average 86.4 days, longest regional duration—to Angola—

- 103.3 days); Table 22 (duration on the coast of 332 voyages, 1790-7, average 113.4 days, Niger Delta 96.7 days); and Table 32 (duration to the West Indies of 327 voyages, 1790-7, average 59.7 days). [The middle column of Table 2 may also be compared with figures in Drake, below, pp. 146-7 (duration on the coast of 290 voyages, average 101 days, Niger Delta 91 days). Eds.]
- 15 For a discussion of this point in regard to the French slave trade, see Herbert S. Klein and Stanley L. Engerman, 'Factors in mortality in the French slave trade in the eighteenth century', *Annales* (forthcoming). A sampling of the distribution of the timing of crew deaths in the surgeons' reports indicates that the period on the African coast was one of high crew mortality.
 - 16 On average the vessels spent about 45 days in West Indies ports before returning to England, with the port time for Jamaica slightly longer than this. Since no data were provided on return cargoes, the explanations of these differences and their relationship to trading patterns cannot be determined.
 - 17 For similar observations of differences in mortality rates among African areas, see Anstey, 'Volume', *op. cit.*, p. 25, and F. E. Sanderson, 'The Liverpool delegates and Sir William Dolben's bill', *THSLC*, 124 (1973), p. 57-84, p. 76. Table 3 may further be compared with the results of an analysis of HLRO Return, calculated in a different way (e.g. including zero mortality returns), in Lamb, 'English Atlantic slave trade', *op. cit.*, Table 35 (average mortality from whole African coast 5.1 per cent, from Niger Delta 9.7 per cent).
 - 18 See Herbert S. Klein and Stanley L. Engerman, 'Shipping patterns and mortality in the African slave trade to Rio de Janeiro, 1825-1830', *Cahiers d'études africaines*, 15 (1975), pp. 381-98.
 - 19 This pattern is also noted in Sanderson, 'Liverpool delegates', *op. cit.*, p. 76.
 - 20 Indeed the highest share of males was for slaves arriving in Barbados (the earliest island settled)—67.0 per cent.
 - 21 See Herbert S. Klein, 'The Cuban slave trade in a period of transition', *Revue française d'histoire d'outre-mer*, 62 (1975), pp. 67-89. For those considered to be coming from Africa, the percentage male was 66.8. See also H. S. Klein, 'Slaves and shipping in eighteenth century Virginia', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 5 (1975), pp. 383-411.
 - 22 Though the pattern seems plausible, it differs somewhat from that in the Rio slave trade, 1795-1811. See Herbert S. Klein, 'The Portuguese slave trade from Angola in the eighteenth century', *Journal of Economic History*, 32 (1972), pp. 894-918.
 - 23 For Dolben's Act of 1788, see Elizabeth Donnan, *Documents illustrative of the history of the slave trade to America* (Washington, 1930-5), 2, pp. 582-9. The carrying capacity would vary with the number of males and children carried, but in the following calculations these points are ignored.
 - 24 There is some indication that for smaller ships the carrying capacity under the new legislation was higher than before, and that the impact of the law was greatest on ships of greater tonnage. See British Museum, Add. MSS. 38416, Liverpool Papers, items 300 and 301.
 - 25 For the debate on the first of these, see Sanderson, 'Liverpool Delegates', *op. cit.*

- 26 On this, see Christopher J. French, 'Eighteenth-century shipping tonnage measurements', *Journal of Economic History*, 33 (1973), pp. 434-43, as well as Anstey, 'Volume', *op. cit.*, pp. 3-4. While Anstey's argument suggests no need for any adjustments in Table 4, French argues that it is probable that 1786 marked an effective transition in the tonnage recorded, and that some adjustments need be made in order to determine the impact of Dolben's Act. While the latter case seems persuasive, the failure of our sample to indicate a sharp break in 1786 and 1787 (relative to 1782-5) in average tonnage per ship or in slaves per ton leads us to present here (with some uncertainty) the unadjusted data. It should be noted, however, that an adjusted series would provide a better link with the tonnage data in the House of Lords list. See also footnote 27. [For a further view on tonnage adjustment, see Lamb, above, Appendix I, pp. 105-6. Eds.]
- 27 If we had followed the adjustment indicated by French, 'Measurements', *op. cit.*, p. 440, and for purposes of comparison applied his overall ratio of old to new tonnage to the Table 4 data for 1782-7, the figures would be 224.4 tons per ship and 1.97 slaves per ton. Since the relationship of capacity to tonnage depended on whether the vessel's tonnage was greater or less than 200 tons, no simple adjustment to average capacity is possible. Adjusting by the average ratio of old to new tonnage would lead to an overestimate of the capacity ratio, but if we make this adjustment, then Dolben's Act reduced slaves per ton by about one-quarter, less than did the subsequent legislation.

The Liverpool-African voyage c. 1790-1807: commercial problems

B. K. DRAKE

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, Liverpool merchants controlled two-thirds of the British share—itsself probably not less than one-half—of the trade which carried slaves from Africa to the Americas. Liverpool had gained this position by rapid expansion of its activities since 1740, during a period when the overall volume of the Atlantic slave trade was increasing. By the simplest test of economic efficiency, success, Liverpool's organisation of slave-trading was more efficient, and increasingly more efficient, than that of rival ports, in Britain or elsewhere. In an age when entrepreneurial efficiency was creating in Britain the world's first Industrial Revolution, it is hardly surprising that Liverpool merchants aimed at higher efficiency and aimed successfully; and it would be of interest to compare the efficiency dynamic of the Liverpool slave-traders with that of other groups of British traders, and with that of other entrepreneurial elements in the contemporary British economy. But it is doubtful whether the fragmentary business records which survive, or for that matter the sparse records which were all that contemporary businessmen thought it necessary or possible to make, would allow comparison in any detail. However, the records of the Liverpool slave trade, thin and scattered though they are, do allow a study to be made of certain aspects of the economic context in which efficiency was sought. The commercial history of a typical Liverpool slave voyage c. 1800 can be usefully analysed in terms of 'problem-solving'. What were the factors which controlled the economic outcome of a voyage, and in particular to what extent did these

involve problems which rational decision on the part of the merchants or their agents could solve, in the sense of producing the desired economic outcome? The records do not provide a full answer to these questions, for in general they fail to record either the totality of solutions of particular voyages, or the solutions to any specific problem of a sufficient proportion of voyages to be statistically significant. But they do make clear the number and nature of the problems, demonstrating the complexity of organisation and decision-making in a single slave voyage. This essay concentrates on two sets of problems, those that arose in Liverpool, before the departure and on return, and those that arose in West Africa during the trading activities.¹ A third set of problems, those that arose in the West Indies, will only be considered in so far as they directly affected other issues. The essay deals with a period of great interest immediately before abolition; but since this period had its own marked characteristics (for instance, a predominance of war years) it should not be assumed that what was typical of the African voyage of 1790-1807 was typical, in all or perhaps most respects, of its earlier periods.

PROBLEMS IN LIVERPOOL

(a) Financing a voyage

In the later eighteenth century transport and communications problems encouraged the registration, ownership and management of a vessel within one port. Consequently Liverpool's slave trade lay almost entirely in the hands of the town's commercial community. Between 1788 and 1793, 98 per cent of the ships leaving Liverpool for Africa were owned within the port.² The typical Liverpool slave-trader was a 'general merchant', whose trading was not limited to that provided by the slave trade, and whose shipowning activities were often incidental to his other interests.³ These could include buying and selling, importing, exporting, distribution and brokerage, in various commodities, in a number of overseas markets. The trade was not dominated by the small-scale grocer, tailor, etc., as has sometimes been suggested.⁴ On the contrary, in its final years the trade was controlled by a few large houses; for instance, seven firms accounted for 52 per cent of the slaving ventures between 1789 and 1791.⁵ But

since the merchant community had interconnected interests and any trade had many ramifications, most of Liverpool's leading merchants and functionaries were at one time or another involved, directly or indirectly, in the slave trade.⁶ Even avowed opponents of the trade, such as the Rathbones, could allow returning slave-ships to freight West Indian produce on their behalf.⁷ William Roscoe, a notable advocate of abolition, was a banking partner of slave-trader Thomas Leyland.⁸

From the moment a slave venture was suggested an entrepreneur had to choose between a complex series of alternatives. The success of the undertaking depended to a large extent on the merchant's knowledge of the problems involved in African trade, and on his professional ability to solve them. The first essential decision related to the financing of the enterprise; should it be undertaken entirely by the entrepreneur, or by the formation of a partnership? Relatively slow returns on capital invested in the slave trade influenced merchants to put their money in a number of vessels with several associates, rather than in one vessel each. In 1790, for instance, 30 out of 58 ventures to Africa and the West Indies were organised by partnerships of more than four people.⁹ Financing voyages from within the port was facilitated by the availability of long-term credits, of up to eighteen months, particularly from Manchester manufacturers.¹⁰ Moreover, local banks provided extensive short-term loans to Liverpool slave-traders. In the 1780s firms such as T. and W. Earle, F. Ingram, J. France, J. Blackburne, G. Hodson, Earles and Molyneaux, Allanson and Barton, all had overdrawn accounts at Heywood's Bank.¹¹ It would appear to have been quite common for firms to finance new ventures through an extension of credit as well as from profits gained from previous voyages.

(b) Obtaining a vessel and cargo

After arriving at a formula for financing the voyage, a decision had to be taken concerning the purchase of a vessel. It was common for the merchant planning a venture, or one of his partners, to be also engaged in shipowning, and therefore a vessel might be provided from within the partnership. If the firm's ships were already employed, the merchants might invest in additions to their capital stock. It was convenient to buy ships that were

constructed for the slave trade, but West Indiamen could be adapted with facility. In the last years of the slave trade it would seem to have been common for merchants to purchase vessels for a particular voyage. For instance, 71 per cent of the slave-ships leaving Liverpool for West Africa in 1798 had been registered since January 1797. Moreover, as many as 47 per cent were registered during 1798 itself, suggesting that these ships had been acquired specifically for a venture in that year.¹² It is conceivable that some merchants had vessels built specifically for new ventures. However, only six of the 135 slave-ships departing from Liverpool in 1798 had been built since 1 January 1797. In contrast, no less than 34 of these ships had been captured from the enemy during 1797 and 1798. There would also appear to have been a fairly rapid turnover in the ownership of slave vessels. One-third of the ships sailing from Liverpool to West Africa in 1798 changed hands before 1802. This rapid turnover, taken together with the high losses at sea during war years, indicates that a large number of merchants, whether by choice or circumstance, retained an interest in a particular slave-ship for only a relatively short period; and the tendency in the 1790s was towards the early sale of older vessels and their replacement with newer stock, either from the construction yards or from naval courts.

Selection and provision of cargo might well be a complicated affair. Partners could be called on to settle specific debts for cargo with traders not involved in the enterprise; and they sometimes did this by the manipulation of their general trading budgets extrinsic to the slave voyage accounts. Moreover the nature of 'general trading' often allowed a slave-trader to include commodities for export to Africa which were acquired through an extension of his other interests, at primary or wholesale cost. The selection of cargo was also influenced by elaborate Customs regulations which had to be both observed and utilised. It was expedient at one time to use the Isle of Man and Ireland as entrepôts for the collection of duty-free goods, particularly spirits.¹³ Special licences and securities had sometimes to be obtained for the export of certain items such as firearms and gunpowder.¹⁴ Other commodities might be given favourable customs treatment: for instance, Bombay 'arrangoes', a type of bead normally liable to be charged duty, could be packed and put

under seal in London and transported to Liverpool for re-export to Africa, duty-free, so long as they were shipped within a certain period of time. Merchants had to be well informed about these regulations, particularly when there was a prospect of war, since this might result in a ship being forced to remain in port longer than had been expected and thus beyond duty-free time-limits.

(c) Season of departure

Once the merchant had determined the degree of partnership required, the methods of financing, the availability of a suitable vessel, and the optimum selection of a cargo, and had obtained a captain, crew and perhaps insurance,¹⁵ the ship could sail for Africa. The timing of the departure from Liverpool was in some instances carefully regulated. It has been suggested that slave-traders visited West Africa during the dry season, defined as approximately between October and March, since the incidence of sickness amongst both crew and slave cargo inevitably increased when ships were loaded during the rainy season.¹⁶ If this proposition is accepted at its face value, then ships leaving Liverpool between February and July would be likely to operate in West Africa during the defined wet season and would consequently be taking uneconomic risks. In fact, the shipping information contained in the contemporary Liverpool press indicates that large numbers of vessels were leaving port at times of the year that were likely to lead to this alleged wet season trading. Four separate analyses have been made of all traced sailings to Africa from Liverpool, in the years 1791-4, 1798, 1799 and 1804-7.¹⁷ These show that between 48 per cent and 60 per cent of all slave-ships left Liverpool between February and July. This might indicate that the West African seasons had little or no influence on the time of the year ships left Liverpool, or alternatively that the earlier definition of the wet season underestimated the complexity of seasonal variations in West Africa.

In order to assess these alternatives a closer examination of the West African seasons becomes necessary. It is true that the coast from Sierra Leone to the Cameroons experiences more or less the same rainy season, with the heaviest rainfall between April and October. But to the south, in Angola, the pattern is reversed, with ports such as Mayumba and Luanda experiencing their wet

season between October and April.¹⁸ Furthermore, the wide generalisations above are in some respects misleading. For instance, whereas during August an average of 35 inches of rain falls at Freetown, and 27 inches at Douala, only 2.5 inches falls at Lagos and 0.6 inches at Accra. Thus the implications for health of a 'wet' month may vary considerably from district to district. At Saint Louis, Accra and Luanda, some 'wet' months have lower rainfall and therefore better health prospects than some 'dry' months at Calabar and Douala. Of course exact information on rainfall was not available in the eighteenth century. But the pattern of numbers of 'wet days' in the month is very similar to that of total rainfall in the month; and ships' captains regularly recorded in their logs wet and dry days. Thus it was possible for merchants to obtain information regarding the relative wetness of specific months at specific ports on the West African seaboard. There is no positive evidence that this information was accumulated and tabulated; but it is unlikely that what captains and agents knew about African weather was ignored by Liverpool merchants when making decisions on the timing of their voyages.

Just over half the vessels sailing from Liverpool to West Africa in 1798 left the port between February and July and thus were active in Africa during the alleged 'wet season'. But 47 per cent of these vessels were destined for Angola and its neighbourhood, regions south of the equator enjoying their dry season during the months May to October; and a large part of the remainder were bound for districts such as the Gold Coast, where the worst excesses of the rainy season could be avoided. Thus, the owners may have been more aware of the variability of the coastal climate than they have been given credit for. That so many ships left Liverpool between February and July was partly the result of the growing value of the Angola market in the last years of the trade. Even vessels arriving in Angola during that part of the coast's wet season were not necessarily taking uneconomic risks to health since the amount of rain falling there was sometimes less than that falling in the same month in other regions where it was a 'dry' month, for instance, in the Delta. It is likely that the relatively low rainfall throughout the year was one of the principal factors which encouraged Liverpool merchants to shift trading activities to Angola.

Nevertheless it cannot be shown that the seasonality of departures was influenced strongly by climatic considerations. In the periods examined, there were substantial sailings in each quarter of the year, with a majority of between 51 per cent and 74 per cent occurring in the two middle quarters. The proportions in the first and last quarters varied sharply from period to period and were between 10 per cent in the last quarter in 1799 and 32 per cent in the first quarter in 1804-7. The overall seasonal balance suggests that some merchants either were unaware of the varying West African seasons and their effect on health and trade, or, more likely, were prepared to risk the disadvantages of wet months for the sake of stealing a march on competitors. The irregularity in more detail, particularly from year to year, suggests that factors other than the climatic one entered into the timing of voyages, and that these perhaps operated differentially as between years and periods.

(d) Duration of voyage

Having completed transactions on the African coast and in the Caribbean, the slave-ships returned to Liverpool—without, of course, their slaves.¹⁹ Instead, the slave-fleet returned with small quantities of African produce and large quantities of Caribbean produce (cotton gaining on sugar).²⁰ But as a part of the proceeds of selling slaves in the West Indies normally returned to Britain in the form of bills of exchange, few ships were fully laden with produce and some returned empty. Caribbean produce could be carried either as freight for another merchant, or as the property of the entrepreneurs organising the voyage, when it represented an investment of all or part of the proceeds of selling slaves: in either case, the captain and local agents had to decide how profitable or unprofitable it would be to wait for or seek out cargo. Thus, Liverpool merchants had to envisage, advise on, and accept a wide range of decisions relating to transactions in the West Indies. Further, on the return of the slave-fleet they frequently found themselves facing more decisions, in relation to the sale of produce and the discounting of bills of exchange. As regards the decisions which in the last analysis had to be taken away from Liverpool by the captain with or without local advice, merchants envisaged these by giving their captains general guidance in the

instructions provided before ships left Liverpool. These instructions were often elaborate, and they referred to decisions to be taken in Africa—in relation to regional trade preferences, selective slave prices, on-board treatment of slaves, and preferred African cargoes—as well as to decisions to be taken in the Caribbean.

The complexity of transactions both on the African coast and in the Caribbean lengthened the overall voyage. From the start of the venture, entrepreneurs had to take account of the fact that the final economic outcome depended not only on immediate profits but on the length of time that capital had been locked up in the voyage. It is therefore important to inquire how long a slave voyage took, from Liverpool to Liverpool. Previous estimates vary from about twelve months to eighteen months.²¹ Voyages from Nantes, Liverpool's French counterpart, are thought to have taken between fifteen and eighteen months, and it was considered unusual for capital outlay to be returned within two years. The Dutch triangular voyages seem to have lasted from sixteen to thirty-two months.²² Calculations of the duration of Liverpool's slave voyages were made from the records of two periods, 1791-4 and 1804-7. The Liverpool press, combined with official returns of slave voyages, provided sources for the period 1791-4, while the newspapers had to be used by themselves for the years 1804-7.²³

Between 1791 and 1794, 208 named vessels sailed from Liverpool for West Africa (excluding a handful engaged in direct-return trade with the West African seaboard). These vessels made 398 voyages in the five years, of which it proved possible to trace the length of 178. Thus the following figures are based on a 45 per cent sample of the voyages in the Liverpool slave trade for those years. Starting with the vessels arriving back in Liverpool in 1792, 59 complete voyages have been traced. Their average time away was just over eleven months (334 days), and the extreme durations were 140 days and 485 days. As perhaps one would expect, the outbreak of the war in 1793 led to an increase in the duration of voyages. The complete voyages of 63 of the ships arriving back in 1793 have been traced: their average duration was just under twelve months (363 days) with extreme durations at 155 days and 636 days. Whilst there was not a large increase in absolute terms over 1792 the outbreak of war did tend

to slow down the triangular voyage, and this trend continued. The completed journeys of 35 of the ships returning in 1794 which have been traced averaged over $12\frac{1}{2}$ months (376 days), and ranged from 206 days to 646 days. The increase in the length of the overall voyage in 1793 and 1794 is the more significant inasmuch as the average length of time spent on the African coast had fallen in those years.²⁴ A number of ships returning in 1793 and 1794 had experienced unusually long voyages; it is unlikely that the extra duration resulted from exceptionally long periods on the West African coast, and more likely that it was caused by the activities of French privateers in the West Indies. Ten of these returning ships had an average voyage length of 19 months and 19 days, and these exceptional voyages may reasonably be discounted from calculations of the average normal duration of a slave trading voyage. Discounting four voyages in 1793 and six in 1794 reduces the averages for these years to 347 and 341 days, close to the average for ships returning in 1792 (334 days).

Thus it was possible to trace 168 normal voyages in 1791-4 which completed the triangular journey in an average of just over eleven months (340 days). The duration of a slaving venture could vary from 140 to 485 days, and the standard deviation was 92 days. But we can be sure that the average is reasonably meaningful since, of the 168 voyages, no fewer than 107 or 64 per cent were in fact under a year in duration. This majority duration is rather shorter than has often been suggested.²⁵

It might have been expected that towards 1807 the average would have shortened because merchants tried to undertake as many voyages as possible before abolition. Between 1804 and 1807, 190 ships were involved in the slave trade from Liverpool. It proved possible to trace from the Liverpool newspapers only 82 journeys. The average for this period was just under twelve months (361 days). The duration of slaving voyages ranged from eight to twenty-five months but the standard deviation was only 92 days, and 60 per cent of the vessels were away from Liverpool for less than a year. Thus it would appear that the average voyage was no shorter than it had been in the 1790s²⁶ Even in 1807 the average for 22 returning ships was 360 days. This suggests that there was no significant rush for the last legal slaves. However it must be conceded that the effect of large numbers of French privateers operating in 1807 from Cuba and Haiti, after the

alliance of Spain and Holland with France, may have counter-balanced any movement towards shorter voyages in that year.

The length of a slave-trading voyage was probably related not only to the supply system and the state of the market in a specific part of the West African seaboard, but also to the current demand in Europe for specific West Indian commodities and to the willingness to wait for a Caribbean cargo or for convoy protection. Non-economic factors such as seasonal variations in climate, and problems arising from the state of war, had to be given due weight. Undoubtedly merchants wanted as quick a return on capital outlay as was possible. But while it was technically feasible to complete the triangular voyage within a year, merchants had to balance the time gained from quick turnabouts in Africa and the West Indies against the possibility of loss arising from a less than adequate cargo of slaves, and from an uneconomic cargo from the Caribbean.

PROBLEMS IN AFRICA

(a) The independent produce trade

West Africa's marine export trade had been founded on the demand for produce rather than slaves. Even after the advent of the triangular network West Africa continued to export gold, ivory, timber, dyewoods, gum, beeswax, leather, spices (notably Malaguetta pepper) and palm oil. These commodities were often purchased by slave-traders, as a supplement to the slave trade or for purposes directly connected with slaving (palm oil, for instance, was fed to the slaves on the Middle Passage), but there was also a steady demand from traders engaged primarily in produce trade. In certain regions of West Africa, the export of commodities such as camwood, ivory and beeswax was always of greater value than the export of slaves. For instance, gum remained the major export of the Senegal valley throughout the slave trade era.²⁷

In the later eighteenth century Britain was maintaining and extending its interest in the produce trade. For instance, in 1787 a petition was signed by 57 Liverpool merchants, including prominent slave-traders, asking that the duty on African timber be lowered. At that time, African ebony was charged an import

duty of £8.16 per ton while American ebony was imported duty-free.²⁸ The petition was rejected. Nevertheless, Liverpool entrepreneurs continued to expand their investment in the produce trade. Unfortunately few official documents record details of vessels sailing to Africa for produce-trading. Statistics relating to ships returning to Liverpool directly from Africa give some indication of the volume of the trade: but the figures are inflated by the inclusion of ships returning in ballast, these being mostly either tenders of the slave-fleet or ships whose main function was to supply the forts on the coast belonging to the Company of Merchants. Hence, it has been necessary to draw information from a variety of minor sources; and it has only proved possible to trace ships sailing from Liverpool to Africa for produce-trading between 1789 and 1793, in 1795, and between 1799 and 1807.²⁹ In these years the number of these ships sailing annually was small, never exceeding twenty, and normally between four and ten. The proportion of shipping leaving Liverpool for Africa which was engaged solely in the produce trade varied between 2 per cent (1804) and 13 per cent (1807), and averaged only 5 per cent. Thus the produce trade was a useful development of Liverpool's African contacts, but nevertheless only a minor subsidiary of Liverpool's African commerce.³⁰

Small though it was, Liverpool's involvement in the produce trade did provide sizeable commercial outlets for a number of Liverpool merchants. In the years 1789-93, 1795 and 1799-1807, thirty-one commercial houses were engaged in the produce trade with Africa. The firm of Henderson and Sellar was most frequently involved, operating eleven voyages during the whole period. Since Henderson and Sellar were also connected with the slave trade, it might seem that slave-traders dominated commodity commerce by utilising their West African experience to switch into the produce trade when economically appropriate. Indeed, of the 53 voyages undertaken by the 31 firms, some 29 were for known slave-traders. However, the remaining 24 voyages were operated by firms that appear to have had no connection with slaving (though it is possible that a few had shares in slave enterprises whose detailed records are not extant).³¹ It would appear therefore that a number of Liverpool entrepreneurs not normally engaged in African commerce had decided that investment in the produce trade was an acceptable economic proposi-

tion. In view of the risks involved (including the possibility of commodity prices in Britain slumping radically while the vessel was away from port) and the relatively slow return on capital invested, Liverpool merchants must have seen the African trade as one with potentially high rates of profit.³² However, it is doubtful whether African supply could have been expanded sufficiently to accommodate large numbers of produce traders as long as the slave trade lasted.

(b) The purchase of produce by slavers

It was necessary to discuss the independent produce trade because slave-traders also dealt in produce; indeed probably only the lesser part of Liverpool's produce trade with West Africa before 1807 was handled by non-slave-traders. Slaving and the trade in produce often existed side by side, in a symbiotic relationship.³³ Brooks has recently suggested that few slave-traders were seriously interested in African produce. He refers to American ivory-traders, who were forced to give extensive credit to African middlemen and were consequently required to wait several months for the ivory to be brought down to the coast; he argues that this was an impracticable delay for slave-traders and thus produce- and slave-trading became differentiated.³⁴ This proposition underestimates the business acumen of African middlemen. If produce was available in the interior, what better way of reducing costs than by employing the slave-caravan to transport it to the coast? This was particularly true of commodities that had a low bar value in relation to the trade goods received in exchange, and which might therefore prove unprofitable to transport to the coast through the use of paid porters. There is evidence that produce frequently arrived on the coast with the Senegambian slave-caravans,³⁵ and this no doubt encouraged captains to take produce on board slave-ships. All along the seaboard, produce could often be stored with less difficulty than slaves, and middlemen found it profitable to build up stocks of certain commodities. For instance, Richard Brew, an expatriate slave-trader resident on the Gold Coast, c. 1780, also dealt in gold, beeswax, the provisioning of ships, and most interestingly, the export of Ijebu cloths from Lagos. These cloths, which were brought in coastal launches to the Gold Coast, were consigned to

the firm of Ross and Niel in London, perhaps for re-export to the West Indies or Brazil.³⁶

The owners of slave-ships sometimes gave their captains specific instructions to trade for African produce. For instance, in 1797 Thomas Leyland informed Captain Bernard of the ship *Earle* that he was to barter the goods consigned to him at 'Bonney for young healthy negroes, Ivory and Palm oil', while in 1782 Parke and Heywood instructed Captain Frayer of the *Harlequin* to proceed 'with the greatest expedition to the coast of Africa and on your way down to Anamaboe call at Cape Lahoe, Appolonia and such places as you think most likely to furnish gold, ivory and slaves'.³⁷ Such instructions might specify that the captain was to conduct his produce-trading operations in a manner contrary to the normal routine of a slave-ship. The use of the long-boat to ply in and out of the rivers on the coast was normally considered inadvisable, as detrimental to the health of the crew and therefore uneconomic. That it was occasionally advised in produce-trading illustrates the value placed by some slave-ship owners on African commodities.

Proceed directly to the River Gambia and there barter our cargo for slaves, gold, wax and teeth, and as you have sufficient cargo we hope you will be able to purchase a good quantity of wax and upon reasonable terms and would have you keep your long boat constantly applying about for it wherever you think it most likely to be had.³⁸

The complex ramifications of this interrelated trading system enabled it to adjust to changing opportunities, which in turn were often limited with the state of international affairs. As well as purchasing slaves and commodities from the mainland entrepreneurs, slavers sometimes operated an inter-ship trade, bartering commodities for slaves and vice versa. This could even take the form of trading one sort of produce to another slave-ship in exchange for slaves and a different sort of produce. Exchanges also took place between produce-trade vessels and slave-ships.³⁹ Indeed it is occasionally impossible to allocate certain vessels to either trade, since cases are known where Liverpool produce merchants contracted to supply slaves to French ships on the coast of Africa.⁴⁰ Evidently produce-traders were aware of the economic possibilities of horizontal integration. Using the smaller vessels to collect produce in the rivers also facilitated the purchase of slaves for delivery on contract, without the problems involved

in the Middle Passage. The tenders could stay on the coast indefinitely (or at least as long as the crew and hulk survived), supplying produce to the firm's major carrier, and slaves to the French and other interested parties.

The slave-trader's decision to purchase African produce depended on his assessment of a number of variable factors. In the first place, a slave-ship's cargo of merchandise for Africa could be designed to contain a surplus over and above the amount necessary to procure the desired number of slaves; or a surplus could arise due to short-term downward movements in the price of slaves on the African coast, or due to a failure of supply of slaves. This surplus, if not employed or employable in the purchase of extra slaves, could be used to buy produce. Secondly, since the trade goods carried to Africa by slave-ships reflected the 'assortment' or package of items which African slave-merchants tended to prefer, and since this assortment could vary from year to year or if the slave-ship traded in a different market from that intended, it was possible for the ship to finish up with an unbalanced selection of goods unsuitable for further slave-trading; and in this case it was desirable to consider alternative uses for the remaining stock of goods. Thirdly, at some point in the trading a captain might decide, even if slaves were still available for the goods he held, to switch to produce, perhaps of one particular kind, by weighing alternative costs. Fourthly, when trading for produce, account had to be taken both of the prime cost of goods (whereas the assortment mixed loss-leaders and high-return items) and of possible fluctuations in the prices of African commodities in Britain, not least in instances where demand was fairly limited and over-supply might tumble prices.⁴¹ To some extent this range of decisions was reduced by act of parliament. The Dolben Act of 1788 restricted the numbers of slaves that could be carried on slave-ships, and this sometimes prevented a captain from using a surplus of trade goods to buy additional slaves and forced him to buy produce instead. If, as has been suggested, average profits in the slave trade fell somewhat in the last two decades of the trade,⁴² this may have encouraged further expansion in the subsidiary produce trade.

Shipping information appearing in the contemporary Liverpool press indicates that in the last years of the slave trade few slave-ships returned to Liverpool without some African cargo on

board. The real value of African produce carried by the Liverpool slave-fleet fluctuated with prices in Britain, and it was possible for losses to be made on return cargoes. But the Davies-Davenport papers show instances where African produce accounted for as much as 60 per cent of net proceeds.⁴⁵ Though such a figure was doubtless abnormal, it is not uncommon to find African cargoes accounting for between 20 per cent and 30 per cent of net proceeds. To give two instances of substantial African cargoes, both relating to a ship returning from Africa and Surinam in 1805, the *Molly* carried 51 tons of barwood, 51 puncheons of palm oil, and 10 cwt. of ivory, of total estimated real value of £5,335; and the *Lord Nelson* carried 853 'elephant teeth' and 6 tons of Malaguetta pepper, valued at £6,535. The above volumes of produce may have been abnormally large for returning slave-ships, yet there can be no doubt that African cargoes were sometimes of significant economic importance to the slave-trader and cannot be ignored either when considering his decision-making, or when attempting to evaluate the profitability of slave enterprises.⁴⁴

Nevertheless, the African produce trade appears to have been, in total, of only limited value to Liverpool's merchant community. The relevant customs figures unfortunately only detail imports at the national level, but even these provide some guide to the volume of Liverpool's trade in African commodities. Between 1786 and 1790, total imports into Britain from Africa had an average annual value of £100,000, compared to imports from Ireland averaging £1,985,000 and imports from the West Indies averaging £3,474,000. By the period 1796-1800, the average imports from Ireland and the West Indies had risen to values of £2,385,000 and £5,898,000 per annum, respectively, while imports from Africa had fallen to an annual average value of £72,000. Thereafter the value of African imports rose again, but in 1805 the value was still only £193,034.⁴⁶ It would seem that at a period when British imports from other regions were increasing imports from Africa were barely holding their own, at least relatively. However, since most slave-ships returned with African produce on board, Liverpool could undoubtedly claim a high proportion of the national imports of African goods. The value of only three commodities, redwood, camwood and ivory, imported into Liverpool in 1805 amounted to £70,790 (real value).⁴⁸ Even if the total value of African imports into Liverpool

was relatively slight, the merchant community, and Britain, benefited from the African produce trade since Africa was virtually the only supplier of barwood/redwood, camwood, ivory, gum, Malaguetta pepper and palm oil. Finally, the experience gained in the produce trade during this period proved invaluable to those Liverpool merchants who sought new or extended openings in Africa after the abolition.

(c) *Pricing slaves*

One of the major problems facing Liverpool merchants was the varying price of slaves along the West African seaboard. Liverpool entrepreneurs seem to have preferred to purchase lower-priced slaves and accept less for them in the West Indies,⁴⁷ rather than to engage in competition for the 'superior' slaves. Pricing mechanisms were often highly complex affairs. The first requisite of trade in any barter economy is an agreed standard of exchange, and a regular form of currency was adopted along most of the West African coast by at least the early eighteenth century. The unit varied from region to region, and might be the 'ounce', the bar of iron, or numbers of cowries. The 'ounce' was in most general use. It was defined as the nominal value set upon goods which cost about 40 shillings in Europe but sold in trade upon the coast of Africa for £4, which was the value of the ounce of gold.⁴⁸ This implied that European entrepreneurs aimed at a 100 per cent markup on goods traded in Africa. Each commodity to be exchanged had a recognised value in terms of the 'ounce' of trade, and a slave was bartered for an assortment of commodities equivalent to a given number of 'ounces'. However, a change in the concentration of African demand for specific commodities could mean that their 'ounce' value resulted in a mark-up greater or less than the desired 100 per cent. Moreover, the ship's captain had to comply with the preferences of African merchants relating to trade goods, and therefore had to make an astute manipulation of the assortment in order to keep the overall mark-up near the expected level. Excessive movement in demand for particular goods was not reflected in the 'ounce' value of the commodity, at least not in the short run, since the demand would be assimilated by adjustments of the assortment, though continued concentration of demand would affect the 'ounce' value

of a commodity in the long run. On the other hand, the number of 'ounces' demanded for the slave could fluctuate both in the short and long run depending on the level of current demand.⁴⁹ Short-term fluctuations in slave price could disrupt the calculations of merchants. A cargo organised for the purchase of 350 slaves at 11 'ounces' each would clearly purchase fewer slaves if the buying price rose above 11 'ounces'.

The slave-trader organised his cargo on the basis of personal assessment of current slave prices on the coast (allowing for mark-up), and the type of trade goods required in the assortments. His knowledge of both was vital to the success of the venture. Since both prices and the goods required varied from area to area, the Liverpool entrepreneur had to be well informed in order to decide where to operate at economic advantage. Failure to ship an adequate supply of the goods currently demanded in a particular region was likely to result in an inadequate intake of slaves.⁵⁰ It is true that insufficient supplies of specific items could sometimes be remedied by inter-ship trade off the West African coast, but contact with other ships was not always possible. Liverpool merchants therefore regularly instructed their captains to bring back detailed information from West Africa regarding the conditions of future demand and supply. Yet no matter how carefully a cargo was organised, the demand in a particular West African locality for certain commodities might be satiated in the period between the planning of a voyage and the arrival in West Africa. This could well result in an unserviceable cargo surplus, and risks would be involved in attempting to expend it by moving to another region of the coast. An alternative strategy would be, as we have seen, the employment of the cargo surplus in the purchase of African produce.

Liverpool entrepreneurs had only very limited opportunities to influence the pricing system. Although the ship's captain was in a position to manipulate the assortment, the extent to which he could do this and the effectiveness of the manoeuvre depended on the existing state of commerce. Excessive demand for slaves in a particular region put the market firmly in the hands of the vendor, and the slave-trader was consequently forced to comply with the requirements of the African middlemen. The 'ounce' price of a slave was almost entirely regulated by the coastal entrepreneur, on the basis of supply and demand. Collusive price agreements

among Liverpool merchants had probably only limited chances of success, except perhaps in a glutted market. In this sector of African commerce, the opportunity for effective decision-making was mainly in relation to where to trade, that is, regional preferences.

The European merchant had also little opportunity to influence or mitigate the system of duties and customs at the African ports. In general each visiting slave-ship was required to give a present or 'dash' to the local chief for permission to trade. These 'dashes' could be as elementary as a small quantity of bread and beef; or they could be as expensive as the price of two slaves. Further gifts had to be given every time the chief came into contact with the ship. Favour was also sought by 'dashing' the king's wives, officers and slaves. As well as more or less informal 'dashes', the slavers were expected to pay formal duties or 'comey' to the African polity. At major bulking centres such as Whydah these dues were considerable.⁶¹ 'Dashes' and 'comey' were undoubtedly a drain on the cargo available for trade (since they were generally paid in kind), but the most Liverpool merchants could do was to instruct their captains to be as parsimonious as possible. Variations in the amount of duty demanded at specific centres may have been a factor affecting the regional preferences of Liverpool merchants.

(d) Regional preferences

Variations in the price and quality of slaves, regularity of supply, customs duties, and seasons, all combined to affect the choice of West African destination. In the early years of the Atlantic slave-trade the parts of the Western seaboard most frequently visited by slavers were Senegambia, Sierra Leone, and the Windward Coast (modern Liberia and Ivory Coast). Recent work has suggested that the sources of slaves gradually shifted eastwards during the latter decades of the eighteenth century.⁶² Examination of extant Liverpool business records indicates that this eastwards movement in slaving applies equally to Liverpool's slave-fleet. Lists of destinations of slave-ships sailing from London, Bristol and Liverpool between 1791 and 1797 in official returns have also been examined in an attempt to quantify the movement. Unfortunately these records did not always note the region or port of call in

West Africa, and the figures for the period 1791-7 are consequently only based on a sample of 27 per cent of listed voyages.⁵³ This restricted evidence suggests that the most popular regions for British slavers in the 1790s were those east of the River Volta; 75 per cent of the slave-ships leaving Britain for Africa were destined for the Niger Delta region (modern Togo, Dahomey and Nigeria) and the South Coast (modern Cameroun, Gabon, Congo and Angola). These were especially the major supply areas for the Liverpool slave trade. The percentage of Liverpool's slave-ships sailing to the region east of the River Volta averaged 77 per cent between 1791 and 1797. Thereafter the proportion trading with the Niger Delta and South Coast rose and fell a little, reaching 83 per cent in 1798 and 77 per cent again in 1803, but falling to 67 per cent in 1800 and 60 per cent in 1807. (The figures for 1798-1800, 1803 and 1807 were calculated on the basis of practically a 100 per cent sample.⁵⁴) Clearly Liverpool's influence in these regions was extensive. Since Liverpool dominated the British trade the fact that a high proportion of Liverpool's slave-fleet was destined for the regions east of the River Volta must have meant that the trade of the Delta and South Coast was very much in the hands of Liverpool merchants. A statement made half a century later referred to Liverpool's position in this region.

When the slave trade existed between this country and the Africans it was almost confined to Liverpool, and the natives have only known Liverpool as their 'friends' as they call them; and if other ships, for instance belonging to London or Bristol, visit the Rivers they call them 'small country' vessels and do not look upon them as legitimate traders; it is a characteristic attached to Liverpool.⁵⁵

Official trade statistics generally treated the region east of River Volta as a single district, and failed to provide separate information on the Delta and the South Coast. In the light of Liverpool's interest in the Gulf of Guinea, it might be thought that the bulk of Liverpool's slave trade immediately before abolition was with the Niger Delta, the South Coast taking only a minor share, but this does not appear to be a valid assumption. According to the sample of official returns cited earlier, by the last years of the slave trade the South Coast was rivalling the Niger Delta as the major supplier of slaves to Liverpool ships, and it actually overtook the Delta in nearly half the years (1798,

1800, 1803, 1807). In 1791-7 the South Coast accounted for just over 20 per cent of the Liverpool slave trade; in 1798-1897 for nearly 40 per cent. Undoubtedly there were many reasons for this eastwards movement in the trade. But probably one of the more important was the ability to trade all year round on the Angola coast, and for much of the year on the seaboard of Gabon and Congo, in favourable climatic circumstances, because of the relatively light annual rainfall noted earlier.

(e) *Turn-around times*

Time meant money to the Liverpool entrepreneur. It is conceivable that regional preferences were much influenced by variations in the length of time required to load with slaves on different sections of the West African coast. An examination of turn-around times has been based on those official returns which specify dates of arrival and departure in relation to named regions of the coast. Since however the full details are recorded for only a small proportion of the total of ships listed, in order to provide a sample of sufficient size for each of the named regions, the figures that follow relate to all British slave voyages, that is, voyages from London and Bristol as well as from Liverpool.

A further word of explanation is necessary with regard to transshipping. A number of vessels were involved in transshipping slaves; that is, they bought slaves on the coast and transferred them to other ships. Transshipping of small numbers of slaves was a relatively normal occurrence; either support vessels fed a mother ship with slaves or a slave-ship sold a few surplus slaves to a competing slave-ship. But transshipping of large numbers of slaves usually involved the vessel in a longer stay on the coast than was normal. As a result, while some of these transshippers proceeded eventually to the West Indies with a cargo of slaves, others returned directly to Britain for refitting. For instance, R. Fisher and Company had two ships, the *Echo* and the *Philip Steven*, which in 1792 returned to Liverpool from West Africa with reported times away from port of 364 and 612 days respectively.⁶⁸ Both were carrying a minute cargo, inconsistent with the time away. Since these ships were neither laden with produce nor returning from the West Indies, it is highly likely that they had been transshipping: either they had been contracted to provide

slaves for other vessels on the West African coast or else for some reason they had been rendered incapable of completing the voyage to the West Indies. Vessels trans-shipping on this scale were involved in a separate branch of the trade; therefore vessels that had off-loaded to other ships more than a quarter of the total number of slaves taken on board have been excluded from the study of turn-around time.⁶⁷ The figures below refer only to vessels engaged in the normal form of the slave trade.

Average length of stay on the coast has been calculated for each year from 1791 to 1797, for six separate regions of the coast; and an overall average for the seven years has been computed (Table 1).⁶⁸ These figures indicate the length of time a merchant

TABLE 1 *Length of stay on the coast, in days, by regions, 1791-1797: numbers of ships in brackets*

<i>Year</i>	<i>Whole Coast</i>	<i>Senegambia</i>	<i>Sierra Leone</i>	<i>Windward Coast</i>	<i>Gold Coast</i>	<i>Delta</i>	<i>South Coast</i>
1791	127 (70)	229 (1)	202 (8)	176 (3)	125 (2)	103 (35)	141 (10)
1792	118 (80)	- -	183 (11)	209 (2)	38 (1)	101 (27)	82 (7)
1793	90 (31)	- -	134 (6)	- -	39 (1)	103 (3)	89 (7)
1794	86 (33)	11 (1)	53 (2)	- -	96 (2)	89 (9)	97 (13)
1795	131 (23)	- -	132 (3)	- -	164 (3)	88 (3)	128 (6)
1796	106 (22)	- -	131 (4)	- -	111 (1)	107 (2)	96 (11)
1797	73 (31)	- -	149 (1)	90 (2)	166 (1)	49 (18)	119 (7)
1791-97	101 (290)	120 (2)	157 (35)	160 (7)	118 (11)	91 (97)	107 (61)

could anticipate that his vessel would await supply in specific areas of the Western seaboard. The average for the seven years was just under 3½ months (101 days). Annual turn-around times fluctuated, rising to 127 and 131 days in 1791 and 1795, and falling to 90, 86 and 73 days in 1793, 1796 and 1797. The more rapid turn-arounds achieved in 1793 and 1794 may have resulted from the drastic reduction in the number of slave-ships trading to West Africa in 1793, due first to the outbreak of war with France, and secondly to the general financial crisis of 1793 with its collapse in credit.⁶⁹ It must have been easier to supply the smaller number of ships visiting the coast in 1793 than was normally the case, while the 1793 residue of supply over demand may have been utilised to meet the requirements of the increased number of ships arriving on the Western seaboard in 1794.

Moreover the French were extremely active in African waters during 1794, and a French fleet attacked and sacked Free-town. These actions must have encouraged British captains to aim at quicker turn-arounds. The rapid turn-around of 1797 is less easy to explain. Rumours of an impending French invasion of Britain may conceivably have encouraged slavers to hasten home; or there may have been a sudden increased supply of slaves due to hinterland upheavals. But this is mere speculation. What is clear about the 1797 average is that it was produced largely by the experience of a single region, the Delta. This leads us to examine the range of regional variations in turn-around time.

Table 1 shows that on average the most rapid turn-around was achieved on the eastern end of the coast, in the Niger Delta and on the South Coast. It may be conceded that the number of traced voyages to Senegambia and the Windward and Gold Coasts is too small to be statistically significant; but the pattern suggested is reasonably consistent with that of the larger number of voyages to Sierra Leone. It is therefore fair to ask why did ships spend more time in the western than in the eastern regions? The simplest explanation, that the longer a ship took to reach its trading region, the shorter the time it could afford to spend there, cannot be adequate, since ships returned with similar numbers of slaves from each region. The explanation must lie, at least in large part, in the supply system of the regions. Though there is insufficient evidence to describe the supply system in detail, it is certain that there were factors which tended to bring about regional variations in volume and regularity of supply, and the records provide glimpses of these variations.

The Windward Coast lacked suitable harbours, and trade was therefore conducted by cruising along the seaboard and anchoring outside the bar of rivers. Small boats or tenders were used to ply across the bar, in and out of the rivers, in search of trade. This could be a lengthy process, and one likely to increase the incidence of sickness among the crew.⁶⁰ Goods and slaves were then exchanged either on the beach—an inherently dangerous operation away from the safety of the ship—or by canoe across the surf, a tedious and precarious task.⁶¹ Supply was generally organised by small-scale entrepreneurs, African, European, and Afro-European,⁶² with limited stocks of slaves and limited

capacity to obtain more rapidly. These small suppliers would also appear to have been the norm along the neighbouring Sierra Leone seaboard, so that here, too, despite the existence of some good harbours, slaving was a relatively slow business. In the Senegambia and Gold Coast regions, turn-about time could vary according to whether the ship was being supplied by a company agent with foreknowledge of the ship's arrival, by an independent entrepreneur providing limited supplies, or by a large-scale supplier under the control of an African polity. European residents often found it difficult to meet demand on a large scale without the assistance and co-operation of African middlemen.⁶³ The facility with which demand for slaves could be met was also dependent on the official and personal activities of the governors of the various forts under the control of the Company of Merchants trading to Africa.⁶⁴ Probably because of the alternative supply mechanisms available, the turn-around time on the Gold Coast could vary from 38 days to 166 days.

Turning to the eastern regions, the Niger Delta and the South Coast had good harbours and large-scale suppliers, and perhaps more fundamentally, their slave trade derived from regular hinterland sources. 'It was precisely the regions of the African coast, the Niger Delta and Congo/Angola respectively, which were linked to trading networks in the interior . . . which were able to yield up, until 1800, a large and increasing supply of slaves.'⁶⁵ Table 1 suggests that the eastern regions were capable of meeting demands for slaves more rapidly than the other regions; and this fits what is known about their supply mechanisms. Evidence about the volume and regularity of supply can be obtained from the log-books of slave-ships.⁶⁶ On the western coasts, though there existed bulking centres such as Bunce Island and Whydah where companies could stock slaves, in general ships made up their cargo by small purchases, in single numbers from small suppliers, with days intervening between purchases. On the South Coast, though daily purchases were often small, they were more regular: large numbers of slaves, brought from the interior in caravans, were stocked on the coast by African merchants, who sold them off in small numbers to European traders.⁶⁷ The log-books of 15 vessels trading on the South Coast between 1791 and 1794 record a normal daily intake of five slaves and less, with occasional larger purchases, the largest of 68 slaves.

Finally, in the Delta, slaves could often be obtained in large numbers. For instance, in 1792, the *Brook* took on board 81 slaves on 10 October, 87 slaves on 21 October, and 61 slaves on 3 November; and in 1795, the *James* took on board 117 slaves on 1 March, 169 slaves on 10 March and 51 slaves on 12 March.

The reasons why the Delta and the South Coast could supply slaves faster are now well known. In both regions, African traders on the coast were in contact with interior networks; for instance, Delta 'Houses' were in contact with the Aro network in Igbo country.

Fairs where the slaves of the Heebo nation are obtained, are held every five or six weeks at several villages which are situated on the banks of rivers and creeks in the interior, and to which the traders of Bonny resort to purchase them. The preparation necessary for going to these fairs generally occupies the Bonny people for some days. Large canoes, capable of carrying 120 persons, are launched and stored for this voyage. The traders augment the quantity of their merchandize by obtaining from their friends, the captains of slave ships, a considerable quantity of goods on credit according to the extent of the business they are in the habit of transacting.⁶⁸

Large-scale purchases of slaves in the interior required large stocks of trade goods; and the operations of the African slave-merchants depended on their being granted credit by the European slave-merchants who imported the goods. In other regions, European residents had always received goods on credit; and expatriates on the Gold Coast had even been able to pay visiting ships for commodities with bills of exchange drawn on a company in London.⁶⁹ But in general it was unusual to give African merchants credit; and the exceptional development of this system in the Delta may have been linked to the existence, at one of the ports, Old Calabar, of an institution, the Ekpe, which though traditional in origin, was apparently capable of being employed as a debt-collecting agency.⁷⁰

While the study of turn-around times undoubtedly suggests reasons why Liverpool slavers came to prefer the eastern regions of the coast, it also shows that slave-trading was not without major uncertainties and many unpredictable elements. Even Table 1 indicates that many voyages had exceptional turn-around times: why, for instance, did the Delta turn-around time fall to an average of 49 days in 1797, and why did the two traced voyages to Senegambia stay there respectively 229 and 111 days?

Even in the Delta, supply networks were not so efficiently organised that they provided a completely flexible reaction to European demand. Had they done so, then there would have been a regular relationship between the total number of slaves taken on board and the turn-around time. Using the data in the official records again, the relationship has been investigated for all traced slave-ships in a single year (1791), first for all ports in West Africa, then for Delta ports, and finally for a single Delta port, Bonny.⁷¹ But no regular relationship appears even at the level of a single port. To take the Delta: 19 ships in the sample loaded at the average rate of between 2 and 4 slaves per day, but 15 ships lay outside this broad band, 6 loading faster (up to 7 slaves per day) and 9 loading more slowly (down to 0.2 slaves per day). While it may have been of some value to Liverpool entrepreneurs to know that, in the most effective loading region, a ship could, more often than not, obtain 300 slaves in from 75 to 150 days, and that occasionally a ship could do even better, this rule-of-thumb had to include the corollary that there was a one-in-five chance that a ship might take longer. Many factors controlled hinterland supply, the prevalence of wars and other slave-making occasions, and the personal requirements of the primary supplier, as well as current prices on the coast and expectations of future demand. However devoted the Liverpool slave-merchants were to the cause of economic efficiency, they were in no position to organise African conditions and institutions; and though they showed flexibility in their responses to the circumstances of the West African coast, for instance, in their regional preferences, the slave trade remained a fairly chancy business, a fact which may have helped to reconcile them to its abolition when it came.

NOTES

- 1 This paper draws on my unpublished thesis, 'Liverpool's African commerce before and after the abolition of the slave trade', M.A., Liverpool, 1974. Since presenting the thesis, I have been living in Borneo, with only limited facilities for academic work; and the publication of this paper was made possible by the co-operation of the supervisor of my thesis, Dr P. E. H. Hair, who prepared the final draft. Notes relating to studies of the trade which were not available to me at the time of writing the thesis have been added by Dr Hair and are indicated with an asterisk. The relevant part of the thesis is based on the official

sources described in Appendix II to D. P. Lamb's article (pp. 106-9), and on the Liverpool press. Each of these two major sources lists a number of voyages not recorded in the other; and the Liverpool press, though its coverage is generally not as wide as that of the official returns, provides additional information, particularly about return dates and cargoes. For further discussion of sources, see the note in my thesis, pp. 1-8. I am indebted to Professor R. T. Anstey for drawing my attention to the House of Lords records, and for showing me drafts of forthcoming articles and his book; and I have benefited from lengthy discussions with my friend and fellow-student of the Liverpool trade, Frank Sanderson.

- 2 D. Pope, 'Shipping and trade in the port of Liverpool 1783-1793', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Liverpool, 1970 (subsequently referred to as Pope), 1, pp. 438-42.
- 3 R. Craig and R. C. Jarvis, *Liverpool registry of merchant ships* (1967), p. 201.
- 4 J. Wallace, *General and descriptive account of the ancient and present state of the town of Liverpool* (Liverpool, 1795), p. 229; E. Williams, *Capitalism and slavery* (1944), p. 37.
- 5 J. E. Merritt, 'The Liverpool slave trade 1789-1791', unpublished M.A. thesis, Nottingham, 1959 (subsequently referred to as Merritt), p. 51; cf. R. Anstey, *The Atlantic slave trade and abolition 1760-1810* (1975) (subsequently referred to as Anstey), pp. 6-10.
- 6 F. E. Sanderson, 'Bibliographical essay: Liverpool and the slave trade, a guide to the sources', *THSLC* 124 (1973), p. 157.
- 7 Shipping columns of the contemporary Liverpool press.
- 8 J. A. Picton, *Memorials of Liverpool* (1875), 1, p. 271.
- 9 Pope, 1, p. 475; 2, p. 334.
- 10 Merritt, pp. 54-5.
- 11 Heywood Papers (in the possession of Barclays Bank, at Heywood's Branch, Liverpool, and studied by kind permission of the manager), balance sheets for 1787.
- 12 Liverpool Customs House, Annual merchant ship registers: a new registration had to be made for every change in a vessel's ownership and for any substantial alteration in the vessel's construction. Earlier in the century British-built ships in the Bristol slave trade lasted 10-12 years: for a detailed discussion of the shipping aspect of that trade, see P. D. Richardson, 'The Bristol slave trade in the eighteenth century', unpublished M.A. thesis, Manchester, 1969 (hereafter Richardson), chap. 3.
- 13 Keele University Library, Davies-Davenport Papers, also on microfilm in Liverpool University Library (hereafter Davies-Davenport), letter of 26.5.1753 from W. Davenport to Captain Sachevorall.
- 14 R. C. Jarvis, *Liverpool customs letterbooks* (1954), letters of 21.11.1773, 5.1.1780: for complications relating to cargoes in the earlier slave trade from Bristol, see Richardson, chap. 2.
- 15 On obtaining crew and insurance, see Anstey, pp. 12-13.
- 16 G. E. Brooks, *Yankee traders, old coasters and African middlemen*, Boston (1970), p. 79; A. G. Hopkins, *An economic history of West Africa* (1973), p. 107; Public Record Office (PRO) CO 267/92, f. 346, evidence of K. Macaulay.
- 17 Sources: 1790-4 figures, House of Lords Records Office, Slave trade papers (hereafter HLRO/ST), 1.7.1799, 'Table of extracts from slave-

- ship logbooks'; 1798 figures, R. Brooke, *Liverpool during the last quarter of the eighteenth century* (Liverpool, 1853), pp. 681-4; 1799 figures, *Liverpool and slavery . . . by a genuine Dicky Sam* (Liverpool, 1884; reprinted 1969), pp. 120-9; 1804-7 figures, Liverpool press. For detailed figures, see pp. 201-3 of my thesis. * A similar analysis reaching similar conclusions is presented in D. P. Lamb, 'The English slave trade in its final phase from the early 1770s to 1807', unpublished M.A. dissertation, Exeter, 1974 (hereafter Lamb), pp. 20-1 and Table 14. Lamb shows that in 1785-97 clearances from Britain to West Africa were at all times of the year, though at a maximum in the summer quarters: the quarterly proportions for Liverpool vessels were 17 per cent, 31 per cent, 28 per cent, 24 per cent. Sources: 1785-8 figures, a customs series in *Parliamentary Papers (PP)* 1789, XXIV, 631, pp. 1-8, which includes a small number of produce vessels; 1789-1797 figures, PRO T64/286 and HLRO/ST.
- 18 *Tables of temperature, relative humidity and precipitation for the world, part IV, Africa*, Meteorological Office, HMSO (1967): details and diagrams in Appendix 2 of my thesis.
- 19 * As far as is known, no slave-ship ever brought a cargo of slaves to the Mersey, contrary to local mythology (cf. Williams, *Capitalism and slavery*, *op. cit.*, p. 63); and probably the only black faces seen in Liverpool in the eighteenth century were those of free blacks or slaves who were domestic servants of captains or West Indian planters passing through or of resident merchants, and those of young relatives of Black African traders who were being educated in Liverpool.
- 20 For a discussion of return cargoes and Caribbean problems in general, see B. K. Drake, 'Continuity and flexibility in Liverpool's trade with Africa and the Caribbean', *Business History* (1976).
- 21 Cf. Merritt, p. 4.
- 22 P. H. Bouille, 'Slave trade, commercial organisation and industrial growth in eighteenth century Nantes', *Revue française d'histoire d'outre-mer*, 59 (1972), p. 82; R. Anstey, 'Volume and profitability of the British slave trade 1761-1807', in S. Engerman and E. D. Genovese, *Race and slavery in the western hemisphere: quantitative studies* (Princeton, 1974), pp. 3-31.
- 23 1791-4 figures, HLRO/ST 28.7.1800 (order date 10.7.1799) and, for date of return, *Williamson's Liverpool Advertiser*, *Gore's General Advertiser*; 1804-7 figures, *Gore's G.A.*, *Liverpool Chronicle and Commercial Advertiser*. Problems arising in relation to the use of commercial information in the Liverpool press are discussed in my thesis, pp. 2-5.
- 24 See p. 146 below.
- 25 Merritt, p. 4; A. Mackenzie-Grieve, *The last years of the English slave trade 1750-1807* (1941), p. 24; Anstey, p. 36. * Using a different source, PRO T64/286, Lamb analyses the duration of 376 voyages from Liverpool 1790-5 (pp. 76-8, Table 39). He calculates an average of 372 days, against 356 and 361 days for voyages from London and Bristol, with 52 per cent of the Liverpool voyages taking under 360 days. Though this broadly agrees with the text in showing that over half the voyages took under a year, the average duration is 2-3 weeks longer than that indicated in the text for a normal voyage in the shorter period 1791-4.
- 26 Note that the two periods had the same standard deviation.

- 27 Hopkins, *Economic History*, *op. cit.*, pp. 87-8.
- 28 PRO Board of Trade 6/7, 'Memorial of Liverpool merchants trading to Africa', 3.2.1787.
- 29 Sources: 1789-93 figures, PRO T64/286 and Liverpool press, HLRO/ST, 22.3.1794; 1799-1807 figures, Liverpool University Library (LUL), Peet Papers 15.3.159, 'List of vessels sailed to Africa for legitimate trade 1799-1804'; Liverpool Public Library (LPL), Roscoe Papers, 5607, 'List of ships clearing Liverpool for a general cargo 1806-8'.
- 30 After 1780, while Liverpool was concentrating on the slave trade and had overtaken Bristol and London, these other ports became more active in the produce trade, particularly on the western part of the coast: see my thesis, pp. 52-3. Meanwhile Liverpool's specialisation in eastern coast produce led to palm oil being regularly imported several decades before the 1810s, contrary to what is implied in K. O. Dike, *Trade and politics in the Niger Delta 1830-1885* (1956), p. 49.
- 31 For a list, see Appendix 6 of my thesis.
- 32 Between 1789 and 1807, the average length of traced produce voyages was 13½ months, compared with an average of just under one year for normal slaving voyages. Perhaps because of the deterioration in vessels caused by delays on the coast and consequent slower returns, between 1789 and 1796 no fewer than 12 out of 27 Liverpool produce trade ships were lost at sea or captured by the enemy. Sources: PRO T64/286 and Liverpool press.
- 33 B. L. Mouser, 'Trade, coasters and conflict in the Rio Pongo 1790-1808', *Journal of African History*, 14 (1973), p. 45.
- 34 Brooks, *Yankee traders*, *op. cit.*, p. 14.
- 35 British Museum (BM) Egerton MSS. 1162A, f. 82, 'Observations on the trade to Sene-Gambia', 13.2.1779.
- 36 M. Priestley, *West African trade and coast society* (1969), p. 79.
- 37 L.U.L., Dumbell Papers, letter of T. Leyland to Captain Bernard of the *Earle*, 5.4.1797; letter of Parke and Heywood to Captain Frayer of the *Harlequin*, 1782.
- 38 Davies-Davenport, letter to Captain Sachevorall of the *Charming Nancy*, 26.7.1753.
- 39 BM Add. MSS. 43841, account book of the *Mongo* of George 1785-6, exchanges with the French ship *Nérée*, 23.9.1785; B. Martin and M. Spurrell (eds.), *The journal of a slave trader, John Newton 1750-1754* (1962), p. 20.
- 40 Such a contract was undertaken in 1787 by the three firms of Joseph Woods, Ralph Fisher and Co., and Hartly, Cumpstick and Co., of which the last two were firms normally engaged in the produce trade: BM Add. MSS. 33416, f. 89. In 1787 the Fisher Company despatched to Gabon three ships of 37 tons, 62 tons, and 411 tons, all listed as 'wood' ships. The smaller vessels were capable of plying in and out of the rivers and collecting produce, which was then carried back to Liverpool on the larger ship. But in this same year the company undertook to supply 500 slaves to the French on the African coast; and it must be assumed that the slaves were collected on the 'wood' vessels. Similarly, the only vessels sailing to Africa in 1787 for Hartly, Cumpstick and Co. were three ships of 93, 100 and 232 tons, destination the Windward coast, all listed as 'wood' carriers. Yet this firm was contracted to supply 1200 slaves to the French on the African coast.
- 41 V. M. Johnson, 'Sidelights of the Liverpool slave trade 1789-1807',

- Mariners Mirror*, 38 (1952), p. 279: cf. LPL, Bostock Papers, letter to W. Cleveland, 4.4.1789.
- 42 Anstey, Table 1, p. 47.
- 43 Davies-Davenport, accounts of the *Preston*, 9.7.1787.
- 44 Cf. Anstey, p. 45.
- 45 E. Schumpeter, *English overseas trade statistics 1697-1808* (1960), Table VI, p. 18; *PP, Accounts and papers*, 1812, x, p. 83. The figures are official values.
- 46 S. N. Syder, 'The effect of the abolition of the slave trade on Liverpool's commerce', unpublished M.A. thesis, Liverpool, 1955, Appendix C; PRO, Customs 17/27, 'Statement of navigation, commerce and revenue for 1805'.
- 47 Merritt, p. 69.
- 48 N. Uring, *The voyages and travels of Captain Nathaniel Uring* (1726, reprinted 1928), p. 41; M. Johnson, 'The ounce trade in eighteenth century West Africa', *Journal of African History*, 7 (1966), p. 202.
- 49 Falconbridge, *Account*, *op. cit.*, p. 9.
- 50 Ashton, *West African trader*, *op. cit.*, p. 23; Davies-Davenport, letters of W. Whaley and co-owners of the *Chesterfield* to Captain P. Dwyer, 1.4.1748, and to Captain J. Grayson, 20.6.1748; PRO T70/1532, letter of R. Brew to B. and A. Heywood, 1.8.1774; Martin and Spurrell, *Journal*, *op. cit.*, p. 16.
- 51 Falconbridge, *Account*, *op. cit.*, p. 8; BM Add. MSS. 43841, ff. 7-10; C. W. Newbury, *The western slave coast and its rulers* (1961), citing P. E. Isert, *Voyages en Guinée* (Paris, 1793), p. 135.
- 52 P. D. Curtin, *The Atlantic slave trade: a census* (Madison, 1969), p. 150.
- 53 HLRO/ST, 1.7.1799, 'Table of extracts from slave ship's logbooks'.
- 54 Sources: 1798 figures, Gomer Williams, *History*, *op. cit.*, pp. 682-4; 1799 figures, Dicky-Sam, *Liverpool and slavery*, *op. cit.*, pp. 120-5; 1800 and 1803 figures, LUL, Peet Papers, XIV, 3, 159; 1807 figures, LPL, Roscoe Papers, 5603.
- 55 *PP, Accounts and papers*, 1850, IX, p. 213, evidence of R. Dawson.
- 56 *Williamson's Liverpool Advertiser*, 18.6.1792, 24.12.1792.
- 57 The dividing line is necessarily arbitrary: the number of regular trans-shipping vessels thereby excluded between 1791 and 1797 is 32. * For a detailed study of trans-shipping and re-landing in the 1790s, see Lamb, pp. 47-54.
- 58 The source of Table 1 is HLRO/ST, 28.7.1800 (order date 10.7.1799). The regions are defined as follows: south to River Gambia (Senegambia); east to Cape Mesurado (Sierra Leone); east to Cape Apollonia (Windward Coast); east to River Volta (Gold Coast); east to River Cameroons (Niger Delta); south to southern Angola (South Coast). The base number for each year is the number of vessels whose time on the coast was recorded, less the number trans-shipping more than one-quarter of the total of slaves. Since times are recorded for some vessels whose exact destination was not stated, the figure in the left-hand column exceeds the total of the figures in the other columns. * Lamb provides a different breakdown of almost the same basic figures and shows that in the whole period 1790-7, of all British ships trading in West Africa, 17 per cent took less than 49 days, 32 per cent took 50-99 days, 25 per cent took 100-149 days, 15 per cent took 150-199 days, and 11 per cent took 200-369 days. The average trading duration was 113 days. Of all ships trading in the Niger Delta (defined differently

- and including part of Drake's 'Gold Coast' and excluding part of his 'South Coast'), the average trading duration was 97 days, and the proportions for the periods given above were 23 per cent, 33 per cent, 27 per cent, 10 per cent and 6 per cent (Table 22). Note the large proportion of relatively quick turn-arounds in the Delta.
- 59 F. E. Hyde, B. B. Parkinson, and S. Marriner, 'The port of Liverpool and the crisis of 1793', *Economica*, n.s. 18 (1951), p. 367. Voyage durations increased in 1793 and 1794 (see pp. 133-4): the wartime conditions which probably were responsible may also have meant that there was less international competition on the African coast.
- 60 Falconbridge, *Account*, *op. cit.*, pp. 48-9; Johnson, 'Sidelights', *op. cit.*, p. 285.
- 61 BM Add. MSS. 43841, entry of 20.6.1785; E. Martin, *Nicholas Owen: journal of a slave dealer* (1930), p. 105; Martin and Spurrell, *Journal*, *op. cit.*, p. 53; G. Nørregard, *Danish settlements in West Africa* (Boston, 1966), p. 87.
- 62 BM Add. MSS. 33416, f. 35, letter of E. Corrie; f. 154, letter of J. Jones.
- 63 For instance, Richard Brew, an expatriate trader on the Gold Coast, succeeded in creating a major riot at Anomabu when he tried to eliminate the gold takers from their role as intermediaries between the hinterland markets and the coastal entrepreneurs. On the other hand, acting as agent for a London company, Brew had sufficient credit to enable him to organise a bulking centre at Anomabu for the company: Priestley, *West African trade*, *op. cit.*, pp. 71-2.
- 64 Although the governors were specifically instructed not to trade on their own account, there can be no doubt that this regulation was frequently ignored. In 1778 it was claimed that at least one-half of all the Gold Coast's trade passed unofficially through the hands of the Company's officials. BM Add. MSS. 42074, vol. VIII, f. 57; Falconbridge, *Account*, *op. cit.*, p. 54; B. Cruikshank, *Eighteen years on the Gold Coast* (1853), pp. 82-3.
- 65 Anstey, pp. 78-9.
- 66 HLRO/ST, 19.6.1799 and 28.7.1800 (order date 10.7.1799): 110 log-books specify area of trade and number of slaves taken aboard each day. * Lamb provides a more detailed analysis of daily purchases of slaves on 248 voyages to specified regions 1790-1797 (pp. 39-41 and Table 23). Regional averages were: Sierra Leone 2.67, Angola 4.26, Gold Coast 4.61, Niger Delta 5.22. Moreover 70 per cent of the Sierra Leone region vessels purchased at an average rate of under 2.00 per day, compared with less than 10 per cent in every other region; and 30 per cent of the Gold Coast vessels and 29 per cent of the Niger Delta ones purchased at an average rate of over 6.00 per day, compared with 5 per cent for Sierra Leone and 16 per cent for Angola. Note that these regions are not the same as those in the text (see note 22).
- 67 P. M. Martin, *The external trade of the Loango coast 1576-1870* (1972), p. 100.
- 68 John Adams, *Remarks on the country extending from Cape Palmas to the River Congo* (1823), p. 130. On the Delta 'Houses', see A. J. H. Latham, *Old Calabar 1600-1891* (1973), pp. 51 ff.
- 69 John Adams, *Sketches taken during voyages to Africa* (1822), pp. 112-14; Priestley, *West African trade*, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

- 70 Mouser, 'Trade in the Rio Pongo', *op. cit.*, p. 50; D. Forde (ed.), *Efik traders of Old Calabar* (1956), p. 16; Latham, *Old Calabar*, *op. cit.*, pp. 27-8, 35-9.
- 71 Source as in note 66. For more detailed results, see my thesis, Appendix 10. * And for recent comment on the inelasticity of slave supply, see J. C. Miller, 'Legal Portuguese slaving from Angola, 1760-1830', in P. Emmer, J. Mettas, and J.-C. Nardin (eds.), *La traite des noirs par l'atlantique*, special number of *Revue française d'histoire d'outre-mer* 62 (1975), p. 159.

The historical debate on the abolition of the British slave trade

ROGER ANSTEY

From time to time historical themes erupt into controversy. Just such an eruption has taken place recently in the intensive debate on New World slavery and is associated especially with the writings of Tannenbaum, Elkins, Stamp, Davis, Genovese, and Fogel and Engerman. Less in the public eye, but of comparable importance, is the slower-tempo debate over the abolition of the British slave trade in 1807. It is particularly appropriate to review the debate upon this event in the present volume since abolition had important implications for Liverpool. We shall draw especial attention to all that has followed the publication in 1944 of Eric Williams' important and controversial *Capitalism and slavery*,¹ and look particularly at a number of very recent contributions to the debate.

The first major study of British abolition was by Thomas Clarkson, himself an important protagonist, in his two-volume *History of the rise, progress and accomplishment of the abolition of the African slave-trade by the British Parliament* (1808). An important key to his interpretation is given in his peroration where Clarkson speaks of the abolition campaign as 'a contest between those who felt deeply for the happiness and the honour of their fellow-creatures, and those, who, through vicious custom and the impulse of avarice, had trampled underfoot the sacred rights of their nature, and had even attempted to efface all title to the divine image from their minds' (2, pp. 580-1). The essence of Clarkson's book is narration of a conflict between good men and wicked. It is invaluable on the structure of the abolition campaign, on its inspiration and grass roots organisation, and is a

useful survey of the parliamentary debates; naturally it represents only the insight of a campaigner.

Thirty years later, and significant for the hardening of historiographical tradition, came the *Life of William Wilberforce* (5 vols.) in 1838 and the associated *Correspondence of William Wilberforce* (2 vols.) in 1840, both the work of Wilberforce's sons, Robert and Samuel. Emphasising the primacy of religious and humanitarian motivation in their subject, the leader of the abolitionists, the result was to confirm in the national consciousness a conviction of abolition as a demonstration of the triumph of altruism.² This conviction was both enshrined in and further fortified by W. E. H. Lecky's famous dictum (in 1869) that 'the unwearied, unostentatious, and inglorious crusade of England against slavery may probably be regarded as among the three or four perfectly virtuous pages comprised in the history of nations'.³

It remained for the earlier twentieth century to elaborate a fully historical approach to abolition and at first this was informed by the Lecky ethos. Especially notable were three contributions by Sir Reginald Coupland. With the publication of *Wilberforce* in 1923, a work which is a general exposition of British abolition as well as a biography, the groundwork was laid of a scholarly interpretation with the emphasis on religious and moral enthusiasm. In the survey entitled *The British anti-slavery movement*, published ten years later in 1935, Coupland accounted for the ending of the British slave trade in this way:

The British slave trade may be said to have been doomed when Sharp, Clarkson, Wilberforce and their little band of propagandists opened their countrymen's eyes to the actual brutalities it involved, when such men of light and leading as Wesley, Adam Smith, Porteous, and Bentham came out against it, and when the House of Commons, headed by Pitt and Fox and Burke, was converted to the principle of Abolition. It is not surprising that the Revolution and the war delayed its achievement. More remarkable, indeed, is the fact that, only twenty years after the campaign had started, while the war was still continuing and at a critical phase, a commercial organisation, so great and old-established, so immensely profitable, buttressed by such powerful vested interests and regarded so recently as a permanent, if regrettable, necessity of European civilization, should have been destroyed.⁴

Last of the three pieces was Coupland's contribution to the second volume of the *Cambridge history of the British empire* (1940), entitled, simply, 'The abolition of the slave trade'. Though still based exclusively on printed sources this article was

a quite close study of its theme. Writing in much the same period, Frank J. Klingberg in *The anti-slavery movement in England* (1926)⁵ followed a broadly similar line to Coupland but briefly suggested that account must also be taken of the inexpediency of supplying slaves to conquered islands—necessarily rivals of the established centres of sugar-production within the empire—as a cause of British abolition. C. M. Innes in *England and slavery* (1934) and H. A. Wyndham in *The Atlantic and slavery* (1935) treated abolition much as Coupland had treated it.

Another work of this period also subscribed to a more or less humanitarian interpretation of abolition but at the same time stressed that between 1763 and 1833 the West Indies were in economic decline. This was L. J. Ragatz, *The fall of the planter class in the British Caribbean, 1763–1833* (1928).⁶ Its 'decline thesis', as it may conveniently be termed, not only came to be generally accepted but had implications for an economic interpretation of abolition which later scholars were to seize upon. In the meantime, however, it would seem that at the scholarly level, the dictum of Lecky was an only slightly extreme form of the view commonly held until about the midway point of the present century, a view elaborated and justified by the Coupland school.

At least a minor shock to the hardening complacency came when C. L. R. James, in his *The black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo revolution* (1938), advanced, albeit incidentally, the thesis that Pitt's abolitionist enthusiasm was subservient to a design of acquiring San Domingo and continuing to stock it with slaves, all part of a global strategy aimed at breaking the French grasp of the Continental market and replacing it with British colonial sugar. The real historiographical change came however with the publication of Eric Williams' *Capitalism and slavery* in 1944. Neither Williams nor other contemporary scholars seem to have known of Franz Hochstetter's study, *Die wirtschaftlichen und politischen Motive für die Abschaffung des britischen Sklavenhandels im Jahre 1806–7*, published at Leipzig in 1905. This is a work in the 'perfidious Albion' tradition of German historiography, and it employs a species of Marxist analysis. But within the limits of its unidimensional approach, it is a good and detailed economic interpretation, stressing *inter alia* the need to note the relevance of changes in the West Indian economy after 1783, and to distinguish both between

action against the British foreign slave trade and action for the supply of slaves to British islands, and between the May 1806 and February 1807 abolition bills. Williams, for his part, argues that from the time of the American War of Independence onwards the traditional role and privileged position of the British West Indies in the supply of tropical produce, above all sugar, was increasingly being questioned in Britain. The British islands could not compete on the European market with the French Caribbean islands, especially the very fertile San Domingo, and it became clearer every year that the natural links of the expanding British economy were with countries outside the system of imperial protection. Pitt sought to reverse the loss of the European market to San Domingo by an international abolition of the slave trade which would ruin the still expanding foreign West Indian sugar possessions, leave relatively unharmed the largely 'saturated' British islands, and pave the way for the recapture of the European market by British East Indian sugar. When the San Domingo planters, out of fear of Jacobinism, white and black, offered the island to Britain, Pitt's zeal for abolition necessarily dried up and the abolitionists could avail nothing. During the Napoleonic wars there was overproduction of British sugar in relation to available markets, such that 'overproduction in 1807 demanded abolition'. Williams does not disregard humanitarianism completely. That would be 'a grave historical error and to ignore one of the greatest propaganda movements of all time. The humanitarians were the spearhead of the onslaught which destroyed the West Indian system and freed the Negro. But their importance has been seriously misunderstood and grossly exaggerated.'

A number of cogent criticisms of *Capitalism and slavery* were made in G. R. Mellor's *British imperial trusteeship, 1783-1850* (1950), particularly in regard to the alleged encouragement of East Indian sugar production by Pitt. Other specific criticisms appeared in the present writer's 1968 article, 'Capitalism and slavery: a critique'.⁸ It was there argued that Williams had certainly performed a valuable service to scholarship by drawing attention to the economic context of the British slave trade as it affected abolition; but that when one came to particular applications of the Williams thesis, especially his account of the impact of the San Domingo events and of Pitt's failure to press for aboli-

tion, and his argument that overproduction afforded an explanation of the 1807 act (not to mention his dismissal of Palmerston's later zeal against the slave trade as spurious), Williams could be shown to have ignored or misused evidence. Above all, he did not attempt a meaningful study of the political process in Britain where the all-important impingement of his allegedly dominant economic forces must be shown to have taken place.

After *Capitalism and slavery*, it was to be another two decades before a burgeoning concern with the intellectual origins of abolition led to the appearance of a book which shifted the debate decisively forwards. But from the mid-thirties a number of significant contributions illuminated specific aspects of abolition very substantially. An Oxford thesis of 1935 by Anne T. Gary on 'The political and economic relations of English and American Quakers' not only examined the structure of English and American Quakerism in the eighteenth century but shed much light on the origins of Quaker abolitionism. An Oxford thesis of 1952-3 by A. M. Rees on 'The campaign for the abolition of the British slave trade and its place in British politics 1783-1807' is also good on the Quaker role, and for the rest is characterised by the judiciousness of its judgments. A Manchester thesis of 1959-60 by E. M. Hunt on 'North of England agitation for the abolition of the slave trade' is a most valuable study of the grass roots of the movement.⁹ Patrick C. Lipscomb first attracted notice with his 1960 University of Texas doctoral thesis and he subsequently distilled his ideas into an article on 'William Pitt and the abolition question: a review of an historical controversy'.¹⁰ As well as being instructive on the numerous parliamentary debates on abolition, and on the political process, Lipscomb has definitively defined Pitt's role, not least in relation to the political and constitutional limitations under which he laboured. Much later, F. E. Sanderson's 1973 article, 'The Liverpool delegates and Sir William Dolben's bill',¹¹ began an examination of the virtually unstudied area of the activities of the opponents of abolition. The following year, on a quite different tack, Robin Furneaux provided a much-needed, well-researched and sympathetic biography of Wilberforce.¹² Meanwhile an overall, if relatively brief, study of abolition had appeared in 1970 in the shape of Dale H. Porter's *The abolition of the slave trade in England, 1784-1807*.¹³ Porter enlightens our understanding in many ways: in his examination of the West

Indian interest and of other dimensions of the political scene, in his emphasis on the role of Prime Minister Grenville in the final passage of abolition, and in his relation of the abolition campaign to M.P.s' sense of the national interest. But Porter gives disproportionately little attention to the crucial, final stages of the abolitionist campaign and, especially, is misled in his acceptance of Eric Williams' notion of overproduction as a key cause of abolition.

Four years before Porter published, the study of abolitionism had been moved decisively forwards by a major book on the intellectual origins of anti-slavery. This was David B. Davis' *The problem of slavery in western culture* (1966).¹⁴ Of course there had been earlier work on the religious and intellectual origins of abolition: one thinks immediately of Sir James Stephen's *Essays in ecclesiastical biography* (1849); of F. T. H. Fletcher's *Montesquieu and English politics, 1750-1800* (1939); of Wylie Sypher's article 'Hutcheson and the "classical theory of slavery"' (1939) and his *Guinea's captive kings: British anti-slavery literature of the XVIIIth century* (1942).¹⁵ But *The problem of slavery in western culture* was the most profound study of the development of European and American attitudes to slavery yet to appear. The work is far more than even a sophisticated singling out of views of slavery: it is a study of changes in attitudes to slavery in the full context of the intellectual history of Europe and America. The book's particular bearing on British abolition consists in the demonstration of the religious (especially Quaker) and philosophical springs of anti-slavery thought in the eighteenth century to about 1770. A major conclusion to be drawn from the book is that by that epoch those who still defended slavery and the slave trade on philosophical, religious, or legal grounds were outnumbered and outweighed by those who rejected any such defence.

One of the few lines of criticism of this book—it was deservedly well received and gained a Pulitzer prize—was that if long on the delineation and analysis of ideas it was short on the explanation of action. This perhaps suggests why a successor volume, *The problem of slavery in the Age of revolution, 1770-1823* (1975), is concerned to relate the abolition of the British slave trade to socio-economic change within British society, and to seek, at this level, explanations of why anti-slavery feeling was

converted into anti-slavery action. The essence of Davis' interpretation of British abolition is best conveyed by quotations.

The new hostility to human bondage cannot be reduced simply to the needs and interests of particular classes. Yet the needs and interests of particular classes had much to do with a given society's receptivity to new ideas and thus to the ideas' historical impact . . . [Abolition] helped to ensure stability while accommodating society to political and economic change; it merged Utilitarianism with an ethic of benevolence, reinforcing faith that a progressive policy of *laissez faire* would reveal man's natural identity of interests. It opened new sources of moral prestige for the dominant social class, helped to define a participating role for middle class activism, and looked forward to the universal goal of compliant, loyal, and self-disciplined workers . . . The use of anti-slavery sentiment in Britain coincided with an urgent domestic problem of labor discipline and labor management . . . Because the slave system was both distinctive and remote, it could become a subject for experimental fantasies that assimilated traditional values to new economic needs. An attack on the African slave trade could absorb some of the traditionalist's anxieties over the physical uprooting and dislocation of labor . . . By picturing the slave plantations as totally dependent upon physical torture, abolitionist writers gave sanction to less barbarous modes of social discipline . . . Abolitionists could contemplate a revolutionary change in status precisely because they were not considering the upward mobility of workers, but rather the rise of distant Negroes to the level of humanity . . . British anti-slavery provided a bridge between pre-industrial and industrial values; by combining the ideal of emancipation with an insistence on duty and subordination, it helped to smooth the way to the future . . . [Thus] the anti-slavery movement, like Smith's political economy, reflected the needs and values of the emerging capitalist order.¹⁸

Not to be overlooked is an important strand in Davis' argument which asserts that British abolition, as a major part of emerging anti-slavery achievement, had profound implications for general reform in human status, that is, for social reform. And this was no less the case if the abolitionists did not themselves always perceive the drift of what they were doing.

One spring of judgment on Davis' thesis in his second work, is whether the ideas of Antonio Gramsci, which inspired the theme that a dominant class needs to assert a moral hegemony, are persuasive. But whether or not one is beguiled by Gramscian ideas in general, in this particular historical analysis doubt must arise. This is because Davis fails to define the dominant class convincingly. The most credible analysis along these lines would presumably have it that the new commercial and industrial classes were in the vanguard of anti-slavery whereas the landed interest

would line up behind the old system of protection with its consequential support of the slave trade (as Eric Williams argued). In fact, the voting figures on the bill for the suppression of the foreign slave trade in 1806 and on the general abolition bill in 1807 simply do not support such an analysis. In the case of the latter, in the Lords the landed interest must have divided about equally and the new classes were unrepresented, while in the Commons the defeated minority was so small and the majority so overwhelming that a class analysis is meaningless. This said, the fact remains that the insights and erudition of this book make it an outstanding work.¹⁷

Very shortly after Davis' second volume was published, work on the abolition began to appear from the pen of Seymour D. Drescher. One such contribution is included in the present volume, but his *A case of econocide: British abolition and economic development*¹⁸ is the statement of his original argument. Drescher begins by challenging the decline thesis of Ragatz and Williams. Although the West Indies were of manifestly declining importance by 1833, Drescher argues that this decline did not begin before c. 1820. He invokes overseas trade statistics to demonstrate that the percentage share of the total trade of the British West Indies in the overall long-distance trade of Britain was never as high prior to the quinquennium 1768-72 as it was in that quinquennium, and that it was higher than that level in every succeeding quinquennium up to 1813-17. This is but one statistic which must rule out any interpretation of the abolition of the British slave trade as dictated, or even made possible, by perceived decline. Rather than dying of old age, 'British slavery was still riding the wave of the future' on the eve of abolition; and 'abolitionists were face to face with a dynamic system'. Nor was the slave system identified with the mercantilism with which it was integrally associated by Williams: the slave-traders in particular wanted nothing better than complete free trade. Moreover the abolition measures of 1806 and 1807 were enacted in the context of a wave of mercantilist measures—indeed the first act, abolishing the foreign slave trade, was defended on (though not inspired by) mercantilist grounds. Nor, turning to the presumed positive side of the ledger, can any support for abolition from newly emerging capitalist groups be discerned. 'It seems evident', concludes Drescher, 'that the "economic interest"

theory will not account for either the timing, the occurrence, or the maintenance of the abolition of the slave trade between 1787 and 1820'. The clue to abolition instead lies 'in the mass petitions of the British people between 1788 and 1814 and the "massiveness" of the abolition movement, its ability to mobilize an innovative political pressure group, and to demand potential economic risks'.

In 1975 the present writer published his *The Atlantic slave trade and British abolition, 1760-1810* and believes that he has thrown light on a number of facets of abolition. The early part of the book, a study of the slave trade, is not relevant to our purpose here, but the bulk of the chapters are devoted to the intellectual and religious origins, the politico-economic circumstances, and the politics of British abolition. These chapters first demonstrate that the predominant currents of eighteenth-century thought in Britain had latent anti-slavery implications and that black slavery was specifically condemned by the majority of moral and legal philosophers. The dynamic for actual reform, however, which is so explored as to suggest a not unexciting relationship between religion and reform, was religious, mainly Quaker and Evangelical. The political circumstances which for so long prevented the attainment of abolition are then analysed and the strength of the abolitionists and of their opponents assessed. It is suggested that committed abolitionists and 'West Indians' were about equal in numbers, and that the attitude of uncommitted parliamentarians, and their view of the manner in which abolition would impinge on the national interest, were crucial. The usual importance is attached to the change of ministry in 1806 but the book further argues that the major key to the passage of abolition lies in the decision first to abolish the slave trade to all areas except the older West Indian possessions. The consequential Foreign Slave Trade Act of 1806 was justified by the abolitionists almost entirely on national interest grounds. Its successful passage facilitated passage of the 1807 act, but that act stood four square on the appeal to humanity.

Anstey's book is of course not the last word in the debate, but by virtue solely of its culminating concern in the abolition of 1806-7 it can constitute reasonably the last work considered in this essay. All in all the historiography of abolition has changed remarkably over two decades. A rather crude economic determinism

sought to replace a received view which almost unquestioningly attested the primacy of humanitarianism. The intellectual origins of anti-slavery thought and commitment have been brilliantly examined, and the religious and political dimensions of the British abolition have received substantial attention. The very least result of all this activity is that abolition can no longer be seen as something eccentric in and to British history, but as a process which focused various gathering and potent forces and which may have initiated the wave of subsequent reforms in human status.

NOTES

- 1 Published at Chapel Hill, N. Carolina, reprinted New York 1961, and later, with the same pagination. The place of publication of works mentioned in the text, but without a note, is London.
- 2 Another work of similar strain, but less of a guide for abolition as a whole, was Prince Hoare's *Memoirs of Granville Sharp* (1820), in two volumes.
- 3 W. E. H. Lecky, *A history of European morals* (1869), 6th edition 1884, 1, p. 153.
- 4 Quotation from p. 111: the work was reprinted 1966, with an introduction by J. D. Fage.
- 5 Published New Haven and London.
- 6 Published New York.
- 7 Quotations from pp. 152 and 178: for Williams' view of abolition, see especially pp. 135-53 and 178-83.
- 8 *Ec.H.R.* 2nd ser., 21 (1968), pp. 307-20.
- 9 Theses for D.Phil. (Gary), B.Litt. (Rees), M.A. (Hunt).
- 10 *Proceedings of the Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society*, 12/4 (1967), pp. 87-128.
- 11 *THSLC* 124 (1973), pp. 57-84.
- 12 R. Furneaux, *William Wilberforce* (1974).
- 13 Published Hamden, Conn.
- 14 Published, as is Davis' later volume, Ithaca, N.Y.
- 15 Published Durham, N. Carolina, reprinted New York 1969: Sypher's article is in *Journal of Negro history* 24 (1939), pp. 263-80.
- 16 Quotations from pp. 49, 350, 384-5, 466-7.
- 17 This comment on Davis' second volume is based on a review by the present writer, *E.H.R.* 91 (1976), pp. 141-6. During 1975 two further studies touching on abolition appeared, Michael Craton's *Sineus of empire: a short history of British slavery*, and C. Duncan Rice's *The rise and fall of black slavery*, both good surveys and original contributions to the history of slavery, but ignored here since they have little new to say about British abolition.
- 18 To be published Pittsburgh (1976). Quotations are from a typescript kindly made available by the author.

Capitalism and abolition: values and forces in Britain, 1783-1814

SEYMOUR DRESCHER

ABOLITION AND THE HISTORIANS

The abolition of the British slave trade has been rightly regarded as one of the most dramatic alterations in British imperial policy. In 1783 the Prime Minister's response to the first Quaker petition for abolition was a statement combining sympathy with a categorical denial of its practicality. Since it would be next to impossible to induce every nation to give it up for ever, Lord North said, it was unnecessary for parliament to consider forcing British subjects to do so. Thirty years later, the balance of policy had altered beyond recognition. In 1814, when other European powers were preparing to return in force to the slave trade on the African coast, not a single M.P. even suggested the possibility of a concomitant revival of the British trade. Britain's policy, seven years after her abolition acts, was clearly set. The elimination of what had been deemed in 1783 'necessary to almost every nation in Europe'¹ was now to be urged, if not forced, on every nation in Europe. This change of attitude in government and parliament was paralleled by a change throughout the country. In 1783, the Quaker petition had entered parliament alone and isolated. In 1814, abolitionist opinion concerning the slave trade reverberated in hundreds of petitions signed by hundreds of thousands of British citizens.² The most dramatic shift in opinion actually occurred within an even shorter time span. In 1787, the question of abolition had never been moved in either legislative body; but by 1792, the House of Commons had voted overwhelmingly for the gradual abolition of the slave trade. Within

five short years abolitionism had moved from political non-existence to the threshold of victory, even though the threshold was not finally crossed until fifteen years later. Thus an element of Britain's political economy which was considered to be of well-nigh vital significance in 1787 lost all ability to influence policy by 1814.

The question as to why this occurred at these dates has been one of the most puzzling and fascinating in the historiography of modern imperial slavery. There have been essentially two types of explanations offered, sometimes in combination. Both are as old as abolition itself. They are what might be called the 'moral' and the 'material' approaches to the problem. According to the first, the slave trade was destroyed because of its negative moral value. It was essentially and inevitably an institutionalised criminal system of kidnapping and murder. However, many other activities of society, pursued for profit, have similarly been branded as violent, destructive and immoral, without the decay of these activities resulting. The accusation of dehumanisation levelled against slavery has also been applied to almost all forms of economic interaction. In practice, what is 'moral' and what is 'material' is historically and socially determined; and the line between the two shifts from century to century. We need to explain why that line changed its position in the period under discussion, in relation to slavery.

The historiographic tradition which stemmed from the abolitionist movement almost entirely ignored this problem. Evolving within a framework which presumed providential or historical movement in a given progressive direction, the 'moral' school considered its task complete when it had identified the agencies through which the flow of progress made itself manifest. In other words, the history of abolition was largely a history of the abolitionists written in their own terms. From Thomas Clarkson's *History of Abolition* onwards the story was essentially an essay in intellectual or moral chronology.⁸ The historian had only to identify the spreading sparks of consciousness along the road, and the moments at which a critical mass was reached which ignited the conscience of a nation. The obstacles to progress were those which rose from the misguided identification of self-interest with slavery. The story of abolition was thus a triumph of changing consciousness over unchanging economic interests damned by

moral progress. British abolition was a revolution in the moral economy of the British people, and incidentally a justification of the empire.

The alternative or 'material' approach has treated abolition as principally an outcome of shifting economic interest relationships within the Empire. In these writings, the fate of the slave trade becomes a function of the relation of slavery to the evolving economic interests of the metropolis. Beneath the shifting pattern of changes in moral values at the end of the eighteenth century lies a sharper pattern of dramatic economic change. In its starkest form, in Eric Williams' *Capitalism and Slavery*, abolitionism is the façade behind which emerged a new political economy based on industrial capitalism.⁴ Abolition is seen as the ideological superstructure of a shift in the balance of economic power from those interests which favoured slavery to those interests which opposed it. The end of the slave trade is a tale of triumphant economic supersession.

Most recent accounts of abolition attempt to harmonise these two allegedly linked sources of abolitionist success. The supposition is that the influences of economic interest and the influences of evolving moral values were mutually reinforcing. Generally the writers accept the thesis that the slave economy was no longer integrated with the British imperial economy at the end of the eighteenth century, and that this speeded the demise of the trade. The planters of Jamaica, the traders of Liverpool, Glasgow, and London, the manufacturers of Manchester and Birmingham, that is, all who clung to the African trade, had somehow or other lost touch with the prevailing economic trends of the empire and the metropolis. Part of an archaic and inefficient mode of production, slavery and the African slave trade had become obstacles to the progress of the British imperial economy and the political empire which rested on it.⁵

I propose to review these general premises, which have dominated almost all interpretations of abolition. My first task will be to examine the assumption that West Indian slavery in general, and the Atlantic slave trade in particular, were anachronisms in the general economic evolution of the British Empire. My second task will be to examine the assumption that the interests of the American planters and British slave merchants clashed with the prevailing norms of political economy which guided government

policy during the debate over abolition between 1783 and 1807. Finally, I will turn to the question of the relationship between the moral values implied by abolition and the body of social and moral values in British society around 1800, to see whether it is possible to suggest more likely explanations of the strength and timing of abolition.

CONTINUITY OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Over the past four decades a broad consensus has prevailed regarding the economic background to the abolition of the British slave trade. Here we need only outline the main features. Lowell Ragatz and Eric Williams developed a theory of the decline of British slavery after 1763, which was incorporated into almost every subsequent history of abolition. They argued that abolition was preceded by a sharp decline in the value of slavery, hence of the slave trade, to the imperial economy. The decline is asserted to have occurred at almost every measurable level. The British sugar colonies were supposedly past their period of regular growth, and in various phases of stagnation. The planters were beset by limited and marginal resources for expansion, soil exhaustion, rising costs for their provisions and labour, falling prices for their sugar, and chronic disequilibrium between sugar production and the market. In the international setting, the British slave islands were faced with rising competition from non-British rivals. In so far as the British slave trade helped to sustain these rivals, its disappearance would presumably have been a differential gain to the British slave system between 1787 and 1807.⁶

I have shown elsewhere that the economic standing of slavery in the British Caribbean was altogether different from that indicated by Ragatz and Williams, and the accounts which follow them. Over the whole period from 1783 to 1807, the British slave system enlarged its frontier, its supply of virgin soil, its relative proportion of British trade, its imports and exports, its share of world sugar and coffee production, and its overall size, both absolutely and relative to other colonial systems. Short periods of severe profit squeeze for the planters were balanced by others of windfall profits. And the slave trade was, of course, a major ingredient in the continuing expansion of the slave system. In other words, the British colonial slave system after 1783 was doing

what it had done before, and doing it even better. Abolitionism came not on the heels of trends adverse to slavery but in the face of propitious ones.⁷

A second false assumption concerning the economic background to abolition is that economic change in Britain severely diminished the value of the British slave system to the metropolis. At the supply end, the period before the Seven Years War is correctly represented as an age in which sugar was the great commercial crop of slavery. But after 1763 (it is argued) cotton began to gain on sugar, and presumably cotton colonies gained in importance in relation to sugar ones. What is overlooked in this assessment is that down to 1800, the slave West Indies were not only Britain's chief source of sugar but also its chief source of cotton. The rise of abolitionism, and its first major triumphs, occurred during the climax of the 'West Indian' decade of British cotton supply. While Britain's non-slave sources of cotton remained of minor importance, slave labour, both imperial and foreign, continued to be the main support of the metropolitan cotton industry. As a customer for British goods, the slave system was likewise a dynamic element between 1783 and 1807. Thus, in any way in which the figures could be and were measured by contemporaries, the British slave system was outdoing itself between 1783 and 1806. Wartime acquisition of territories meant that an even larger proportion of the British slave trade henceforth completed its trade cycle within the boundaries of the formal Empire.⁸

British slavery patently declined after, not before, the abolition of the British slave trade. Therefore abolition itself may be justly described as *the* economic turning point for British slavery. The significance of abolition and the problems of its causation are not reduced but intensified by examination of the statistics of British slavery in the pre-abolition decades.

CONTINUITY IN THE IMPERIAL POLITICAL ECONOMY

The alleged decline of British slavery at the level of performance represents only one aspect of the prevailing explanation. Even more fundamentally, it is argued that abolition is related to a change in the economic ideology of empire. Abolition is treated as part of the transition from an old empire, dominated by

mercantilism, to a new one, dominated by the principles of *laissez-faire*. As a major constituent of both the old imperial system and general mercantilist policy, slavery should have lost support as the two concepts lost ground.⁹ This is another way of identifying slavery as a retarding element in the development of empire.

The terms 'old imperial system' and 'mercantilist policy' are of course retrospective labels. Contemporaries had no idea that they were living in what was to be regarded much later as a transitional period, and little idea how their actions would accord with, or diverge from, long-term trends. Close scrutiny of the documents makes it impossible to describe the development of the British Empire from 1775 to 1815 in a way that does not allow slavery a continuing and growing role. The imperial losses of 1775-83 involved a far larger proportion of free than slave labour. The West Indies emerged from the American war of Independence as the most important constituent of Britain's settler empire. There was no visible 'swing' to the East, or revulsion from empire in general.¹⁰ With the outbreak of war again in 1793, much more British blood and treasure was spilled in the acquisition of new territories in the West Indies than in corresponding acquisitions in Asia or Africa. The territories gained between 1793 and 1806 included a preponderance of slave-labour areas. In terms of hemispheres it would be possible to argue for a swing to the West (or at least a continuation of a swing to the West) between 1787 and 1807. But it would be more accurate to say that Britain was expanding in both hemispheres in the period of abolitionist agitation. British governments saw no need to make a commercial choice between West and East, between slave and free economies.¹¹

Equally significant is the fact that Britain was not swinging towards *laissez-faire* after 1783. A study of the decisions on the West India carrying trade in 1784, the Irish commercial propositions in 1785, the Navigation Act of 1786, the Anglo-French treaty in 1787, and the Free Port Acts of 1787 and 1792, affords no evidence of a pre-war general shift, or even drift, towards the dissolution of the protectionist framework. John Ehrman's richly documented studies of British commercial policies in the peacetime decade after 1783 show how thickly the departments formulating commercial policy were seeded with men of a protectionist and cautious bent.¹² Charles Jenkinson (later Lord

Hawkesbury, and still later the first Earl of Liverpool) was president of the Committee of Trade from 1784. He placed an unambiguous stamp on imperial commercial policy. It was the stamp of a protectionist, anxious to husband British resources and nurture British trade after the trauma of American independence. George Chalmers, chief clerk at the same Committee of Trade, and Thomas Irving, Inspector-General at the Customs, were both in favour of preserving the general framework of the navigation system. While this outlook brought them into conflict with the planters over an issue like the exclusion of American carriers from the British West Indian trade, they were equally forthright in defending both sellers and buyers of slaves against the encroachments of the abolitionists. These 'protectionists' in the administration also favoured the liberalising propensities of the West Indians themselves on the Free Port question after 1787. William Pitt, the most influential member of the government for almost the whole period of the abolitionist campaign, was not prepared to risk the 'navigation system' for the principle of free trade. He was convinced of the value of extended reciprocity in order to expand trade, but his assessment of the acceptable risks was fairly circumscribed. Even his first bold, though unsuccessful, move for a freer trade with Ireland was made in order to fortify the internal links of empire, rather than as a step towards global free trade. Pitt's pragmatism was rendered even more cautious by the defeat of his move.

Behind such hesitation after 1783 lay not just the heavy hand of the old landed and securities-owning classes, but that of the rising industrial entrepreneurs as well. A class which would one day speak boldly for free trade still frequently ran for the cover of the protectionist system. Thus not only Josiah Wedgwood, speaking for the pottery industry, but even the representatives of the burgeoning cotton industry appealed vociferously (and successfully) to the Committee of Trade for restrictions on the importation of Indian cottons. It was only when economic interests were seriously divided, as with the Anglo-French treaty of 1787, or when they overwhelmingly favoured a move, as with the West Indian Free Port Bills of 1787 and 1792, that the government had leeway to move in the direction of freer trade.¹³

Thus, as far as economic policy was concerned, the post-1783 ship of state was a vessel confined to tacking between fairly

narrow options. Lower barriers with France were matched by new restrictions on American shipping, and a *status quo* victory on the Irish trade. The Free Port bills of 1787 were a loosening up of the West India trade. But they were not a radical departure in policy. The Free Port system had first been introduced a decade before the American war of independence, without any dismantling of the protectionist empire. The renewal of the system in 1787 took place less than a year after the government had strengthened the central fortress of protection by a new Navigation Act. Jenkinson, in moving this bill, alluded to the popularity of protection, its antiquity, and its utility. Not a voice in parliament, so far as we know, was raised in objection in 1786 either to the bill or to the system.¹⁴

The renewal of the Navigation Acts in 1786 was thus a central element of the post-war economic planning: 'If proper means could be devised to secure the navigation trade to Great Britain, though we lost a dominion, we might almost be said to have gained an empire.'¹⁵ Britain carried conventional commercial policy in conventional legislative form into the era of abolitionism. The Free Port Acts were no more than a traditional attempt to extend Britain's trade to foreign colonial systems without Britain bearing the costs and risks of empire, or relinquishing the benefits of protection in the British colonial sector. Moreover, they were designed not only to insure the easy passage of British manufactures to, and cotton from, the foreign colonies, but to enhance the re-export of British-carried slaves to the foreign colonies.¹⁶ Thus, on the very eve of the first abolitionist campaign, one of the two significant moves toward liberalised trade was intimately bound up with the extension, not diminution, of the commerce in human beings.

Certain aspects of this policy are central to our discussion. First, British commercial policy after 1783 was cautious, calculating, and experimental. There was no dramatic or even perceptible swing to the East, or towards free trade, or towards what has come to be called the imperialism of free trade. In restricting the American trade to the West Indies, the government was not cashing West Indian chips for Canadian, Indian, or metropolitan ones. It was testing the extent to which the Navigation Acts system could tolerate limited short-term losses to the West Indian producers in order to promote other economic interests within

the protectionist framework. The government tested and evaluated the resiliency of the trade restrictions year by year. When the system responded well, legislation made adjustments permanent. The consensus on economic policy, when it existed, was to treat everything in the framework of conservative pragmatism, giving up nothing from the past without very good cause. In 1787, the slave trade and slavery were treated no differently from other enterprises.

The second important aspect is the continuity of imperial commercial policy beyond American Independence. Not only were the personnel and interests working through the Board of Trade not likely to demand any dramatic shift in policy, but the machinery of administration remained such that no new philosophy of empire or imperial commerce could emerge.¹⁷ The 'national advantage' was still viewed in the old framework. Adam Smith himself called the expectation of total free trade utopian. Furthermore, the continuity of protectionism held good not only for the peacetime abolitionist period (1788-92), but for the very war years in which abolition was a central issue in British politics. If the Smithian assertion that the West Indies distorted the flow of British capital was disputable when the abolitionist movement began, it was even more dubious in 1806, when the British colonies were forced to buy dearer and sell cheaper than they would have done under free trade. There is some disagreement as to when in the nineteenth century the interests of non-colonial trade began to preponderate over those of the formal empire in determining Britain's general commercial policy. There is firm agreement, however, that free-trade principles did not begin to influence colonial policy until after 1807.¹⁸ Accounts of the long-run swing to *laissez-faire* after 1775 date the beginnings of real movement no earlier than the 1820s. The clear reason for this is that from 1792 to 1815 economic survival absorbed British energies. Abolition therefore triumphed after fifteen years of almost unbroken warfare, climaxed, precisely in 1806-7, by acts against British trade throughout Europe and the United States. It would be impossible to imagine a worse moment for implementing policies based on open market assumptions, or for linking abolition to the claims of *laissez-faire*.¹⁹

Any historiographical explanation which relies on a general tide of anti-mercantilism to explain the rise and triumph of

abolition is therefore vitiated from the start by the demonstrable weakness of that principle in the formulation of imperial commercial policy between 1783 and 1815.²⁰ But apart from considerations of the relative strength of free-trade principles after 1783, recent historians of abolition have erroneously identified British slavery and the slave trade wholly with mercantilism and protectionism. Much of the system was indeed part of the 'protected' sector of British imperial trade. The sugar trade, the West Indian merchants and shippers, and the British exporters to the West Indies, were all 'protected' interests.²¹ However, the slave-related enterprise which most clearly operated in a competitive context was the British African slave trade. Until restricted by a political decision in 1806, well over half of the slaves transported in British vessels eventually wound up in foreign or conquered colonies. The outports had been identified with *laissez-faire* in Africa for generations. It was the slave-merchants of Liverpool and Bristol who in 1749 petitioned for the 'free and open' trade to Africa which was then accepted by parliament.²² The investment of Liverpool and London in the slave system was increasingly diversified beyond the British colonies. The Free Port system had been designed to increase that diversification. At the outbreak of the French wars, a significant amount of British capital was already sunk in the foreign West Indies colonies and a further £15 million found its way to Guiana alone by 1802. British-bought African slaves moved into foreign colonies in the same vessels as British manufactures. The former helped to expand the market for the latter, with gains for British capital at both ends.

A REVOLUTION IN SOCIAL VALUES?

The crucial change in attitudes towards the slave trade occurred neither because the West Indian slave system became economically redundant, nor because of the triumph of free market ideology. It occurred when certain non-commercial judgements on the slave trade gained ground and prevailed. This was not so much an intellectual revolution as a revolution in public and parliamentary opinion.

Considerations which weighed against property in people had been evident long before abolition became a political issue. From antiquity, writers had felt the need for rationalisations of slavery.

It was an institution which paradoxically reduced human beings to the level of livestock, yet required the stock to respond like rational creatures in order to be of maximum value. The modern psychological basis for abolition, based on sympathetic identification of free Europeans with enslaved Africans, and on the legalistic reduction of the slave trade to mere theft and kidnapping, had already appeared in the Germantown Pennsylvania petition a full century before mass petitioning began in Britain. Further, the linkage of slavery with communities plagued by devaluation of work, by violence, and by fear, had led to an abortive attempt to prevent its establishment in Georgia in the 1730s. The disadvantages of slave-based societies were already fully elaborated at the beginning of the eighteenth century.²³ As the northern American colonies seemed more normal, racially and economically, they were seen by those who reckoned in non-economic terms as the more healthy element of the empire in America.²⁴ In contrast, the social and political characteristics of the slave colonies, and especially the sugar islands, had developed long before 1776 in complete opposition to those of the metropolitan community: rule by a narrow absentee oligarchy, the legal exclusion of three-quarters of the population from British due process, the total concentration of economic resources on export staples, the stagnation of local institutions, exemplified in religious, cultural and welfare organisations. Slave societies made inferior communities.

Even the details of the horrors of the African slave trade itself were widely available long before the rise of abolitionism, and as early as 1665 Richard Baxter made a complete and unequivocal condemnation of the slave-trader. While the planter's position might be redeemed if he cared for the souls of his slaves, those who went as 'pirates', to 'catch up poor Negroes, or people of another land, that never forfeited life or liberty, and to make them slaves, and sell them, [carried out] one of the worst kinds of thefts in the world, and such persons are to be taken as the common enemies of mankind'.²⁵ Thus, at the very founding of the British slave empire, traditional acceptance of the slave trade had already been attacked by a major British theologian. Veteran members of parliament were also familiar with both the nature and the magnitude of the slave trade long before 1788. The slave trade and slavery were defended from the outset principally because of the wealth and power they produced, not because of

any argument that they embodied contemporary social or moral values. Plantation slavery could never draw psychological sustenance from identification with any motives more lofty than mere dreams of avarice.²⁶ At the end, as at the beginning of the eighteenth century, the value of the Caribbean islands, in metropolitan eyes, was their cash value. The vital question remains, why was this not enough to protect the system at the end of the century as at the beginning? And the question is sharpened by the fact that their cash value was greater in 1800 than in 1700, absolutely and relatively.

SLAVERY AND FREE LABOUR IN BRITAIN

An answer might be sought in the evolving pattern and status of metropolitan labour. It has been asserted that colonial slavery and the African slave trade could be more easily maintained in the seventeenth century than later because of increasing social stratification in Britain itself. That is, the metropolitan sanction for slavery could be expected to change in tandem with the evolving relation of British labour to British society. This line of explanation poses difficulties. Whatever the limitations placed on the personal freedom of the labourer in Stuart England, servitude, no matter how involuntary, was not perpetual slavery. Englishmen understood and emphasised the distinction. They never applied the status of slavery to members of their own ethnic group anywhere in the empire. Furthermore, even before the consolidation of the British slave system, the metropolitan trend was against personal bondage and against property rights in Englishmen. The last recorded case involving villeinage was heard in 1618, the plaintiff being declared free. By the early eighteenth century, 'liberty' was being increasingly used in a legal sense not as a special privilege but as one's right to do as one wished, unless restrained by law from specific actions.²⁷ It seems unlikely that scholarship will be able to correlate the steps in the consolidation and dismantling of the British slave system with secular trends in the legal status of metropolitan labour.

If the legal position of the metropolitan working classes affords no clear linkage with evolving attitudes towards slavery, it is also difficult to construct an argument on the basis of the position of Africans in the metropolis. The attack on the intrusion of slave

law into England involved no systematic attack on slavery. Before and after the Somerset case the question of property rights in African slaves was clouded with ambiguity.²⁸ In 1693 a judicial decision acknowledged that a man could have property in Negroes in England. But a few years later another decision re-asserted the proposition that English soil frees—an assertion which was then virtually ignored for over half a century. No doubt the loss of the Somerset case in 1772 was a clear setback for the slaveholders. It strengthened the ideological principle that labour in England was part of the contractual, not the proprietary, zone of the capitalist market. Yet the victory was neither total nor clear-cut. The Lord Chief Justice's decision did not, as some abolitionists asserted, abolish slavery in England. Runaway slaves continued to be advertised for and purchased, long after the Somerset decision.²⁹ The decision was sought in order to prevent forcible repatriation of a slave, and it was not the result of any urgent need of non-slaveholding capitalists for African labour in England. Granville Sharp astutely proved that since the price offered for a literate Negro in London was half what he could be sold for in the West Indies, even excluding the charge for 'freight', there was obviously no market rationale for bringing such persons to Britain. Moreover, since 'the English labourer is not able, with hard work, to earn more than what will barely provide him his necessary food and coarse or ragged cloathing', slaves were a conspicuous luxury article within the metropolis.³⁰ The free black population in England represented neither a large body of workers nor any set of specialised skills in great demand. Far from being an indispensable sector of the labour force, it was considered, by friend and foe alike, as a demoralised and largely unemployed sector of the London poor.³¹ The decision of 1772 probably had a deterrent effect on the importation of slaves into Britain. There was thus no struggle within British society between the need for fluid labour and the need for proprietary security.

This line of argument, however, implicitly strengthened the market argument for overseas slavery and the slave trade. While it might have deterred slaveholders from bringing slaves to Britain without taking additional precautions beyond their Common Law rights as 'proprietors', their right to own human beings overseas remained entirely unchallenged. Indeed it was affirmed by Somerset's counsel during the proceedings, and again in the Knight

case in Scotland. Slaves continued to be reckoned as capital in all entrepreneurial and governmental estimates. David Davis points out that Justice Mansfield's decision had to balance the needs of a domestic ideology, wedded to the idea of free labour, against commercial and imperial interests. In terms of our search for the weight carried by commercial and non-commercial values, this is significant in itself. The cutting edge against slavery within Britain came from domestic Common Law, which often ran counter to mercantile practices, and not from international trade law, which was more attuned to those practices. In other words, restriction came from a legal tradition largely insulated from the new inter-continental capitalism.³² Further, the Somerset decision was more than a balancing out of a domestic ideology of voluntarism and free labour against a commercial overseas interest. Foreshadowing the controversy over the slave trade, it was a clash between specific capitalist interests on the one hand, and diffused domestic public opinion on the other.

Public opinion weighed against the proprietary principle. Even before 1772 the London courtroom crowd was more hostile than the Chief Justice to extending the principle of property to human beings. Mansfield at first expressed his fear of coming to a decision in the Somerset case on the ground that if he declared for Somerset, 15,000 blacks in England might be declared free. A large sum of capital would simply vanish. 'Good God!' commented one outraged newspaper, 'is this the language of an English Judge? . . . *Fiat Justitia, ruat Coelum*—Dastardly Braggard!'³³ But the same day the same newspaper announced, without comment, the arrival of the slaver *Polly Duncomb* at Virginia, with 434 slaves. Whether public hostility could be directed so as to operate in the direction of abolition of the Atlantic slave trade was still an open question. In 1787, as in 1677, Negroes were recorded as 'goods and commodities' in commercial legislation. Not until 1788 did they even acquire the status of cargo requiring special regulation in transit.

Finally, it is uncertain whether the decision in 1772 speeded or retarded the further extension of the abolitionist movement. By deterring planters from importing 'insecure' capital into England, and by portending a reduction of the black presence in England, it may have helped to defer consideration of the larger question, at least until a new wave of black refugees arrived from America

after 1783.³⁴ The Somerset case was necessarily argued within the circumscribed boundaries of the Common Law, and the decision underlined a division between Britain and the colonial world which lay at the very heart of the controversy over property rights in humans. For some, the crucial question emerged: to what extent were the norms of metropolitan behaviour to be followed in the colonies? But the slave-merchants apparently slept just as easily after the Mansfield decision as they had before it. As late as 1786 they freely provided Wilberforce with information on the details of their activity.

PERCEPTUAL CHANGE OF 'BEYOND THE LINE'

Two decisive changes had to occur before British society turned against the slave trade. The first was a gradual shift in the perception of the relation of Britain to the overseas world. The second was a dramatic extension of public power to individuals whose opinions on slavery had never before been counted. European-controlled overseas slavery was related to the fact that for almost two centuries after the discoveries beyond the Atlantic, the world to south and west remained another planet for all but a handful of Europeans. Immanuel Wallerstein convincingly argues that the capitalist economy which began in Europe in the sixteenth century, encouraged different modes of labour control in different zones of development. Slavery was adopted overseas because it was a 'pre-eminently capitalist institution', which could be geared to capitalist expansion. And Africa was an eminently suitable source of labour because it lay outside the mainstream of the international economy, so that Europe could feel unconcerned about the economic consequences of wide-scale removal of manpower from this supply region.³⁵

The overseas territories at first lay beyond the line, not only in international treaties, but socially and even biologically. The tropical world was especially associated with violence, death, and dramatic changes of fortune. Lawbreakers beyond the line might return as respected heroes or gentlemen at home. Exoticism therefore created a moral penumbra permitting sharp differences in behaviour on the part of men in England and the same men in the outside world. The descriptive term 'trade' was likewise expanded to include piracy, pillage, and smuggling. As long as

the activity was exercised on remote outsiders, aliens, or enemies, a wide range of behaviour was acceptable. Thus, the dissonance of slavery with domestic practice was mediated by racial and geographical distance. Having neither the power nor the leisure to transform the world, British overseas adventurers and settlers took the rules as they found them. In Africa people were regularly sold, and in the Americas they were eagerly bought. The norms of Africa and America, being profitable, were very acceptable. The British who remained at home had little choice or concern about the rules of overseas behaviour. As late as the middle of the eighteenth century even philosophers hostile to slavery in principle paid homage to the requirements of economic survival in exotic and frontier lands. Montesquieu's influential chapter on slavery in his *Spirit of the Laws* was very significantly located in the section of the book on climate, not in those dealing with trade, war, or liberty, where they would have seemed just as relevant. He clearly wanted to keep slavery out of Europe, and to justify it, in so far as he did, only to the degree that the public good or production in the tropics required coerced labour. Montesquieu's later influence on anti-slavery developed in direct proportion to the extent that his climatological emphasis was ignored.³⁶

However, the dividing line became less clearly demarcated during the eighteenth century. European norms of international law, of personal security, and of economic activity, were gradually extended to the settled colonies. American colonies ceased to be considered exclusively as a frontier, and began to be thought of as normal societies, to be judged accordingly. Africa likewise became gradually identified, not only with the barbarities of human sale and sacrifice, of unlimited sexuality, and idolatry, but with ordered and highly developed agricultural communities. By the 1780s some British even began to seriously consider Middle Africa as a possible location of European settlements.³⁷

This change must not be exaggerated. In the first place the images of a normal society infiltrated, but did not displace, the more exotic images of frontier and barbarous lands. Right up to and beyond the triumph of abolition, travellers to Africa continued to disseminate pictures of a barbaric, unchanging, and indolent continent; pictures which contributed to the empirical argument for the slave trade as a form of necessary adaptation by

Europeans to African society. Moreover, the emerging contrary picture of 'normal' societies in Africa in one respect tended to strengthen the argument for the legitimacy of the slave trade. According to the prevailing interpretations of international law, the internal sanctioning of enslavement by African laws legitimised purchases by Europeans.³⁸ The merchants of Liverpool did not insist that all Africans were born to be slaves, or that they lacked the essential qualities of humans (or even the developed capacities of capitalists). By the 1780s these merchants were actually attempting to educate selected Africans in Liverpool, so as to strengthen their trade contacts and stabilise their sources of supply.

Nevertheless, as the concept that one was beyond the pale of civilised humanity in Asia, Africa, or America came to be eroded, and as Britain came to see herself as mistress of the world's seas and the centre of a single global empire, the exportation of British metropolitan norms of human relations began to seem more feasible. In this sense, Britain's naval hegemony after 1760 marked a clear erosion of earlier perceptions. With their overwhelming victory in the Seven Years War, the British no longer viewed non-European populations almost exclusively in relation to scattered and insecure overseas settlers, who had to define their own relations to the native populations on three unpoliced continents. As metropolitan control tightened, one result was the revolt of the thirteen American colonies. Another was the beginnings of an imperial rather than a local policy towards native populations. By 1788 the policy of defensive non-intervention in native and colonial relations was over, even if the initial manifestations of the change were still haphazard and uncertain.³⁹

The difference between the pre- and post-Seven Years War periods lay not in the decline of the commercial ethos but in the assertion of non-commercial standards alongside it. It was especially evident after 1775 that attempts to maximise trade and revenue at all costs could endanger dominion and lose it. However, this did not mean that abolition of the slave trade flowed logically from a new conception of empire. On the contrary, the slave trade might conceivably have been the last sector to feel the impact of the redefinition of imperial welfare. In 1788, Africa was a continent without British colonies. Senegambia had been abandoned to its African merchants and to the French. War,

brutality and social violence in Africa still had least impact on the peace and security of the empire. Yet, paradoxically, the beginnings of what one historian has called the concept of 'trusteeship' developed first towards that continent where the internal fate of non-Europeans was not in British hands. It was not imperial security that recommended African slaves to legislative action. Since the beings who were first defended by the abolitionists were black Africans, enslaved beyond the limits of the empire, the abolitionists were creating a new category of essential human rights, enforceable within a concrete legal system. The abolitionist standard was here that of humanity in the purest and broadest sense of the word.

We can only skirt the difficult problem of the relation between change in the perception of the overseas world and the general evolution of European philosophy and religion. The impact of that evolution on effective attitudes towards the slave trade is difficult to measure. Until recently, most studies, following the Clarkson tradition, confined themselves to simply enumerating the opinions against slavery: opinions in favour of the *status quo* have not yet been adequately studied and may prove even more difficult to weigh. For our purposes it is necessary to distinguish between academic philosophical and theological treatises on the one hand, and more popular and more urgent writings, often calling for action, on the other. The studies of David Davis and Roger Anstey have amply demonstrated a shift towards anti-slavery among the leading western European writers during the eighteenth century. Davis sensitively traces the major trend and its accompanying ambivalences within the Anglo-French intellectual community, moving from a posture which provided little basis for criticising the burgeoning colonial slave economies, to a point, around 1770, when evangelicals and philosophers were coming from their new perspective to 'sense that American slavery might symbolise all the forces that threatened the true destiny of man'. Anstey has meticulously sought to uncover the dynamic element in evangelical psychology which, when not otherwise inhibited by powerful countervailing pressures within slave societies themselves, placed anti-slavery high on the agenda of social action. Duncan Rice's study of Scottish anti-slavery motivation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries also suggests that the effective shift in attitudes coincided with the evangelical,

rather than with the earlier philosophical phase of the movement.⁴⁰

Enlightenment themes of progress and individual happiness, and the religious revivals emphasising individual responsibility and collective providential progress, may have helped to break down the moral line between Europe and the external world. They may have made it increasingly difficult to rationalise the idea of human beings as mere instruments of other human beings. But the Enlightenment also circulated ideas which could serve the defenders of slavery.⁴¹ The extent to which the balance of attitudes shifted in favour of an active abolitionist policy remains unclear. Perhaps the most one can say is that, at the level of social theory, almost all major writers after 1770 emphasised the anomalous situation of colonial slavery under free Europe, rather than the anomalous situation of the world beyond Europe. Freedom and progress were increasingly accepted by leading thinkers, in Britain at least, as the normal trend of European evolution. Without having any immediate practical purpose, the philosophers probably reflected the views of the broader audience for whom they acted. On the other hand, until the late 1780s all practical questions related to the slave trade were deferentially left to the 'interests'. Slave-trading, like coal-mining, might be judged a harsh and dangerous activity, but as long as it was linked to the wealth and power of the nation on the one hand, and to competitive necessity on the other, the gap between moral judgement and practical action remained as wide as ever.⁴² And as long as the principal interlocutors remained the Council for Trade, the colonial bureaucracy, and the slave interests, the slave-traders were effectively insulated from the slowly changing moral milieu around them.

PUBLIC OPINION: ECONOMICS AND THE MISTS OF FANATICISM

Before the 1770s the slave trade, like any other trade, was the province of those groups who were most directly interested in it. A few hundred well-placed individuals in British society were in a unique position to influence policy. It was considered to be their right to be in continuous dialogue with the political machinery of colonial governance, via petitions, memorials, and private correspondence. However, slavery's special place in the

British Empire could be observed as clearly as the Somerset case. It was symptomatic that one of the traditional clichés of British justice, public silence on a matter still before the bar, was completely disregarded. Either because of its extraordinary status, or because of its obvious ideological implications, slavery called forth an extensive newspaper correspondence. Before 1788, however, there was no way of measuring broad public sentiment on the slave trade, or estimating how many felt that they had the right to an opinion on the slave trade. For example, on the contemporary question of serfdom in the Scottish coal mines, the opinions of those not directly interested were neither sought nor offered.⁴³ The disinterested were apparently also the uninterested. In 1787, the slave trade likewise stood officially where it had stood a century before, a necessarily unpleasant, but a necessary and profitable economic venture. The decisive moment of advance occurred in the winter of 1787–8. A moral debate carried on by occasional pamphlets, or in corners of major philosophical works, suddenly became a mass concern and a political question. Petitions flowed into parliament from all parts of the country.⁴⁴ The country's leading minister placed it on the legislative agenda. For the first time in history the British African trade was subjected to regulations not designed to maximise the profits of investors but to protect, if only minimally, the health and comfort of the 'goods'. By 1792 an even larger wave of mass petitions and respectable parliamentary support had elicited a resolution by the House of Commons calling for the total abolition of the slave trade. Within these few years abolition had moved from a political impossibility to a political imperative. And the traditional ground rules for legislating on economic matters, by leaving it to the interplay of direct interests, were ignored.

It was only when the shocking figures on the mortality and brutality of the trade were taken up by the major figures in parliament, and backed by very large numbers of local meetings called to petition for abolition, that the slave-merchants of Liverpool belatedly took alarm. They were eventually able to undermine the effectiveness, or at least question the implications of many abolitionist statistics. They were able to match the abolitionist political leadership with support of their own from the very peak of the British political and social pyramid. But they were not able to reverse the public decision against them which

had occurred at the outset. There is strong evidence, which cannot be detailed here, that despite their sustained role in the economic life of Liverpool between 1788 and 1806 the slave-merchants became morally isolated in, and even within, the confines of their own city. Their propaganda counter-attack was initially dispersed over several fronts, moral, patriotic, and traditionalist, in an attempt to recapture public opinion.⁴⁵ During the next two decades the whole panoply of non-economic rationalisations was slowly abandoned. But the principal weapon in their armoury, the principal defence of their trade, was an appeal to the ethos of capitalism.

At the end, in 1806-7, this was virtually their sole defence. While the planters could plead the injury to an imperial community caused by abolition, the petitions of Liverpool and Manchester in 1806-7 were pure capitalist documents. In the eyes of the Liverpool petitioners, the abolition bill of 1806 meant only the diminution of the value of their capital in the West Indies, and the destruction of a legitimate enterprise in Africa. The bill violated an established principle of the British constitution, the defence of property. It ran counter to the unchallenged commercial policy of government, by diminishing the established trade of the kingdom, especially in wartime, 'since it is evidently for the public good, during a war which demands all our resources, to augment our mercantile and colonial industry (in every quarter), our productive Capital, our Returns, our Exports and Imports, by every means . . .' Abolition would instead benefit the foreign capital remaining in the trade.⁴⁶ The Manchester petition followed the same lines. Britain's prosperity and wealth, 'the subject of astonishment and admiration to all surrounding Nations', and her independence, confronting French-ruled Europe, were based on the encouragement of private property and individual industry, the extension of manufactures and the freedom to export them anywhere. Uninhibited export to all places that 'offered an advantageous market' was a principle accepted by all governments and all political economists, whatever their orientation. British policy was to set no limits on the 'enterprising genius of the people', especially in the face of an increasing threat of continental blockade. Every one of these capitalist precepts was being violated by the abolition bills.⁴⁷

In all the arguments from Liverpool, Manchester, Glasgow

and London, capitalists were not mobilised against countervailing capitalists with countervailing interests. There were no rival capitalists in the petition lists of 1788, or of 1792, 1794, 1806 and 1807. The sharp rapier of capitalist ideology was mobilised against enemies who refused to fight on the battlefields of capitalist interest, political economy, or commercial policy. Ironically, in the light of subsequent interpretations, which laid stress solely on the power of the market ethic, the slave interest found itself increasingly isolated from the rest of the country. In a kind of paradigmatic leap, the political nation decided that the area covered by capitalist ground-rules no longer extended to the buying and selling of human beings. The form of labour that fitted the market model most perfectly was legislated out of the market.⁴⁸ Henceforth, British capital could buy and use (under increasing restrictions) only slaves already in British ownership.

What so baffled the defenders of the trade between 1787 and 1807 was that the old capitalist arguments were not refuted, except in a vague and unempirical way. They were side-stepped by a premise of radical novelty. Those connected with the slave system felt they, and not their opponents, had been faithful to the economic heritage of the nation. Yet Britain had decided to alter the boundaries of economic endeavour in a way which left them outside the bounds of respectable trade, and 'beyond the line' of acceptability. They were criticised and even ostracised for clinging to a criminal system, for associating respectable commercial towns with criminality, and for damaging the good name of trade by lowering their standards to those of uncivilised Africa. The accusation hurt precisely because the slave-traders considered themselves especially well-deserving members of the merchant class.

The new metaphysical correlation of property with non-human objects, and of contract with men, achieved a major victory against an entrenched economic interest in 1792. Until 1807 the slave-traders fought a desperate rear-guard action, clinging doggedly to their definition of capital. They knew their enemies were not 'interests' but 'fanatics', people who denied that the term 'trade' could be applied to dealings involving slaves and slavery, and who confusingly refused to consider economic and utilitarian arguments as final. They felt the anguish of members of a society which had formerly encouraged them to specialise in

a respectable and profitable activity, and which had now reversed the rules, radically devaluing their skills and experience. They shared the frustration of the Jamaica planters who, on the eve of abolition, were prepared to argue for the trade on the rational premises of political economy—only to find none would listen.⁴⁹ The astonishment of the slave interests about the ‘mists of fanaticism’ that engulfed them has been subtly re-echoed by later generations of historians quite unsympathetic to either the slavers’ cause or their plight. But attempts to ignore or proscribe these mists, or to rationalise them as ‘capitalism in disguise’, have only increased the problem of explaining the victory of fanaticism. The reason is that the fanatics were not mists but myriads, not spectres but masses. It was not a specific political economy or commercial polity which prevailed in the matter of abolition, but a more stringent definition of human relations both in and out of the market place. What stood in support of the slave trade was over a hundred years of colonial development, an almost limitless conception of the primacy of property, and a relatively narrow-based capitalist investment. What stood against it was a century of domestic social and political development, an expanding conception of human identity, and an ideological appeal which was far broader and more durable than that of the slave-traders.

Because it hung on the single thread of capital alone, the allegiance to the slave trade virtually died with abolition. It never called forth that bitter strain of nostalgia which lingers for institutions prized for their own sakes or their ideals. No better illustration exists of capitalism’s great capacity for total conversion. Liverpool suffered from the loss of one of its main channels of trade for a few years after 1807. But even before the end of the war with Napoleon the readjustment had been made, the ships and sailors redeployed. Overlooking the irony that the redeployment had been largely from the African to the American slave zone, Liverpool had complied with the new law of the empire. In 1814 Liverpool was offered a supreme opportunity to demonstrate its allegiance to the new definition of the limits of the market. The Anglo-French Treaty of Paris, allowing France to reopen its slave trade for five years, called forth an unprecedented storm of petitioning throughout Britain. Special joy was exhibited everywhere else when Liverpool, weaned from the trade for a

mere seven years, joined in with a monster petition of tens of thousands of signatures. Yet the Liverpool petition meeting showed the residual clash of the capitalist and abolitionist value systems. The opening speaker, John Gladstone, advocated a new theme of commercial interest to lend support to the appeals to humanity and justice. Not only would France benefit by the lack of competition in Africa, he noted, but it would thereby win the European market for tropical staples, restoring the pre-war British inferiority on the Continent. Roscoe, the Liverpool humanitarian, strongly objected to introducing economic interests into the discussion. He insisted that this would not only dilute the pure strain of humanitarian agitation, but it would reintroduce the calculus of means and ends into the question. If Britain began to think again in terms of economic policy, it might be equally expedient to revive the trade for Britain too. Roscoe therefore successfully moved that the Liverpool resolution restrict its rationale to humanity, as the rest of the country had done.⁸⁰ Roscoe chose to overlook the point that the British slave interest might have cogently argued that Britain should either demand immediate French abolition, which it was not open to Britain to enforce, or else consider British restoration, which was within British capacity. The slave interest instead spoke as if only French abolition was possible. Nothing could better demonstrate how total and inevitable British abolition seemed in 1814, even to Liverpool merchants. Henceforth one could argue the logic of capitalist interest only inasmuch as it respected the policy of abolition. By 1814 the norms of British capitalism had been redefined.

Nineteenth-century capitalism would, of course, ingeniously invent or re-discover forms of semi-slavery for areas of scarce labour 'beyond the line'.⁸¹ But the battle over the treatment of labour as a pure commodity was over in Britain before the industrial revolution finally took hold. The slave trade was rapidly assimilated to piracy as a form of economic behaviour. The ideal of the globe as an open area for unrestrained British acquisitiveness had met its first internal check. If the political nation was not yet prepared to declare that citizens of the empire could no longer possess proprietary interests in men, it had nevertheless declared a total ban on the re-enforcement of those interests from sources outside the empire. Precisely because slavery at the beginning

of the nineteenth century was still fully viable and still profitably integrated with the British commercial system, abolition marked a clear-cut shift in the institutionalised values of British society.

NOTES

- 1 Cobbett's *Parliamentary History* (hereafter *Parl. History*), 22 (1783), pp. 1026-7, speech of Lord North, 17.6.1783.
- 2 Betty Fladeland, 'Abolitionist Pressures on the Concert of Europe, 1814-1822', *Journal of Modern History*, 38 (1966), pp. 335-73, on pp. 358-9.
- 3 Thomas Clarkson, *The History of the rise, progress and accomplishment of the African slave-trade by the British Parliament* (1808).
- 4 See Eric Williams, *Capitalism and slavery* (Chapel Hill, 1944; reprinted New York, 1966). The thesis is repeated in the same author's *From Columbus to Castro: The history of the Caribbean, 1492-1969* (New York, 1970), pp. 280-1.
- 5 See David B. Davis, *The Problem of slavery in western culture* (Ithaca, 1966), pp. 153, 160-4; D. B. Davis, *The problem of slavery in the age of revolution, 1770-1823* (Ithaca, 1975), pp. 52-6; Patrick Richardson, *Empire and slavery* (New York, 1972), p. 87; E. V. Govcia, *Slave society in the British Leeward Islands at the end of the eighteenth century*, New Haven, 1965), pp. 335-6; Jack Gratus, *The great white lie* (New York, 1973), p. 14; Howard Temperley, *British anti-slavery 1833-1870* (1972), appendix on Williams, pp. 273-4; C. Duncan Rice, *The rise and fall of black slavery* (New York, 1975), chap. 4. The most assertive recent rendition of Williams' economic thesis may be found in Michael Craton, *Sinews of empire: a short history of British slavery* (New York, 1974), p. xiii, and chap. 5, especially pp. 239-42. For the fullest statements of the decline thesis, see Williams, *From Columbus to Castro*, *op. cit.*, pp. 226 ff.; *Capitalism and Slavery*, *op. cit.*, pp. 120-7. Works which do not support this theory of senescence before abolition are Glyndwr Williams, *The expansion of Europe in the eighteenth century: overseas rivalry, discovery and exploration* (1966), pp. 278-9; J. H. Parry, *Trade and dominion, the European overseas empires in the eighteenth century* (1971), pp. 277-80, 318-25; and Roger Anstey, *The Atlantic slave trade and British abolition 1760-1810* (1975), p. 42 and note.
- 6 See Lowell J. Ragatz, *The fall of the planter class in the British Caribbean 1763-1833* (New York, 1928), *passim*; Williams, *Capitalism and slavery*, *op. cit.*, chaps. 6-9; Williams, *From Columbus*, *op. cit.*, chaps. 15-17; Davis, *Slavery in western culture*, *op. cit.*, pp. 157-9, 160-4; Davis, *Slavery in the age of revolution*, pp. 52-7; Rice, *The rise and fall*, *op. cit.*, pp. 155-8; Richardson, *Empire and slavery*, *op. cit.*, pp. 60-3; Craton, *Sinews of empire*, *op. cit.*, p. 262-4.
- 7 See S. Drescher, 'Le "Declin" du système esclavagiste britannique et l'abolition de la traite', *Annales* (1976), pp. 414-35.
- 8 S. Drescher, *A case of econocide: economic development and the abolition of the British slave trade* (forthcoming), chaps. 4, 5.
- 9 See Williams, *Capitalism and slavery*, *op. cit.*, pp. 135-42, and the

- works cited in note 7. It should be noted that the identification of the West Indies with the old, or 'mercantilist' empire, is a tradition that precedes Williams and is not confined to adherents of his interpretation. See also the essay of J. F. Rees, 'Mercantilism and the Colonies', in *The Cambridge history of the British empire*, 1 (1929), pp. 561-602; also 2 (1940), Preface, p. vi. Vol. 1, running to 1783, is called *The Old Empire*; Vol. 2, running from 1783, is called *The New Empire*. The 'old' empire, because of the American split, was radically 'defective' (1, p. 783); slavery, tied to the old empire, was among the radical defects (1, p. 819). On the Seven Years War and the American Revolution as the boundary lines between the old and new empires, see also R. Coupland, *The American revolution and the British empire* (1930); Vincent T. Harlow, *The founding of the second British empire 1763-1793* (1952), 1, pp. 3-4. On the close connection between declining slavery and mercantilism, see also Klaus E. Knorr, *British colonial theories 1570-1850* (Toronto, 1944), pp. 156-7, 212-17, 317-18; D. A. Farnie, 'The commercial empire of the Atlantic 1607-1783', *Ec.H.R.*, 15 (1962), pp. 205-18; and Judith B. Williams, *British commercial policy and trade expansion, 1750-1850* (1972), p. 6.
- 10 See Peter Marshall, 'The First and Second British Empires: A Question of Demarcation', *History*, 49 (1964), pp. 13-23. Parry, *Trade and dominion*, *op. cit.*, pp. 277-80; and especially John Ehrman, *The younger Pitt: the years of acclaim* (New York, 1969), p. 332.
 - 11 *Ibid.*, p. 335.
 - 12 *Ibid.*, chap. XII; see also J. Ehrman, *The British government and commercial negotiations with Europe, 1783-1793* (1962), chap. 8. The West India Committee voted *not* to petition against the liberalising Anglo-French treaty of 1787: Duke University Library, Stephen Fuller Letterbook, 28.2.1787.
 - 13 Ehrman, *The Younger Pitt*, *op. cit.*, pp. 208-10, 338-9, 382-3; Arthur Redford, *Manchester merchants and foreign trade, 1792-1858* (Manchester, 1934), pp. 1-14, 126-7; Drescher, *Econocide*, *op. cit.*, chap. 4. On the manufacturing interest and the Free Port system, see Frances Armytage, *The Free Port system in the British West Indies* (1953), chap. 5.
 - 14 See DUL Stephen Fuller Letterbook, 1786-90, letters of 28.2.1786; Ehrman, *The younger Pitt*, *op. cit.*, p. 341. Jenkinson claimed, and the claim went unchallenged, that the Act of 1786 was the only important trade measure to pass unanimously in the course of half a century. See also Ralph Davis, 'The Rise of Protection in England 1689-1786', *Ec.H.R.*, 19 (1966), pp. 306-17. The end of the seventeenth century was not 'when the turn towards free trade began; they were the years when protection began', and the dismantling process began only in the second quarter of the nineteenth century (p. 306).
 - 15 See *Parl. History*, 25 (1785-6), p. 1373, speech of Jenkinson, 11.4.1786.
 - 16 H. C. Bell, 'British commercial policy in the West Indies, 1783-93', *E.H.R.*, 31 (1916), pp. 429-41; Ehrman, *Commercial negotiations*, *op. cit.*, p. 117.
 - 17 See D. L. Mackay, 'Direction and purpose in British imperial policy, 1783-1807', *Historical Journal*, 18 (1974), pp. 487-501.
 - 18 See J. Gallagher and R. Robinson, 'The imperialism of Free Trade', *Ec.H.R.*, 6 (1953), pp. 1-15; D. C. M. Platt, 'The imperialism of Free Trade: some reservations', *ibid.*, 21 (1968), pp. 296-307, and 'Further

- objections to an "Imperialism of Free Trade", 1830-60', *ibid.*, 26 (1973), pp. 77-91.
- 19 Eli F. Heckscher, *The Continental System: an economic interpretation* (1922, reprinted 1964), pp. 51-148; Williams, *British commercial policy*, *op. cit.*, p. 445; François Crouzet, *L'économie Britannique et le blocus continental* (Paris, 1958), II, p. 827.
 - 20 B. Semmel, *The rise of Free Trade imperialism, 1750-1850* (1970), p. 44.
 - 21 See Rees, 'Mercantilism and the Colonies', *op. cit.*, pp. 581-91.
 - 22 *Parl. History*, 14 (1747-53), pp. 565-6, April 1749.
 - 23 See Davis, *Slavery in western culture*, *op. cit.*, chaps. 1 and 5, and pp. 308-9.
 - 24 Richard Koebner, *Empire* (1961), p. 218.
 - 25 The passage by Baxter, quoted from his *Chapters from a Christian Directory*, was written in 1664/5 and published in 1673: see Davis, *Slavery in western culture*, *op. cit.*, p. 338 and note. So unequivocal were Baxter's strictures on the trade that they could be printed without exegesis in an abolitionist broadside a century later. And as early as 1743, John Wesley's *General Rules* for his followers specifically prohibited engaging in the purchase of humans with intent to enslave them: see Donald G. Mathews, *Slavery and Methodism, a chapter in American morality, 1780-1845* (Princeton, 1965), pp. 5-6. See also Douglas Grant, *The fortunate slave: an illustration of African slavery in the early eighteenth century* (1968), *passim*. On Stanley's speech (15.2.1773), see *Parl. History*, 17 (1771-4), p. 732.
 - 26 Richard S. Dunn, *Sugar and slaves: the rise of the planter class in the English West Indies, 1624-1713* (Chapel Hill, 1972), p. 340.
 - 27 See Charles Wilson, *England's apprenticeship 1603-1763* (1965), p. xi; and David Ogg, *England in the reigns of James II and William III* (1955), p. 54.
 - 28 *Ibid.*, pp. 73-4; F. D. Shyllon, *Black slaves in Britain* (1974), chaps. 3-10; James Walvin, *Black and white: the negro and English society 1555-1945* (1973), pp. 120-8.
 - 29 *Ibid.*, p. 128.
 - 30 Granville Sharp, *A representation of the dangerous tendency to tolerate slavery* (1769), pp. 51, 75-6. Much of Sharp's very effective plea for the illegality of slavery in England rested on the accurate assumption that Negro slavery was both alien and novel to the metropolis, pp. 39, 81, 92, 133-4, 153-4, 161. See also Shyllon, *Black slaves*, *op. cit.*, p. 179; Davis, *Slavery in . . . revolution*, *op. cit.*, p. 474 and note.
 - 31 Walvin, *Black and white*, pp. 144-5.
 - 32 Davis, *Slavery in . . . revolution*, *op. cit.*, p. 483. Davis asserts that it was a serious mistake for slaveholders to appeal to villeinage precedents in the Somerset case. As he indicates, these precedents made the slaveholders vulnerable by confusing the distinction between property and personal service rights. It must be recalled, however, that Granville Sharp had already made so strong a case against certain property claims in the Jonathan Strong case that the owners had dropped the case, see Shyllon, *Black slaves*, *op. cit.*, pp. 38-9.
 - 33 *Public Advertiser*, 13.6.1772; Shyllon, *Black Slaves*, *op. cit.*, p. 9; Davis, *Slavery in . . . revolution*, *op. cit.*, pp. 497-8; Walvin, *Black and white*, *op. cit.*, p. 120.
 - 34 *Ibid.*, chap. 4.

- 35 I. Wallerstein, *The modern world-system: capitalist agriculture and the origins of the European world-economy in the sixteenth century* (New York, 1974), pp. 87-8. See also Fernand Braudel, *Capitalism and material life 1400-1800* (English translation, New York, 1974), pp. 371-2, 443.
- 36 C. L. de Seconat de Montesquieu, *De l'Esprit des loix* (1950-5, Paris edition), liv. 15, chaps. 7-8, pp. 222-3, and 416; Dunn, *Sugar and slaves*, *op. cit.*, chap. I; Winthrop D. Jordan, *White over black: American attitudes toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Baltimore, 1969), chap. 2; M. I. Finley, article on 'Slavery' in *International encyclopedia of the social sciences*, 14 (1968), pp. 307-13. On the adaptive quality of European overseas economic activity, see K. G. Davies, *The Royal African Trading company* (1957), pp. 3-4.
- 37 Philip Curtin, *The image of Africa* (Madison, 1964), p. 4.
- 38 See Davis, *Slavery in western culture*, *op. cit.*, pp. 108-18.
- 39 See Koebner, *Empire*, *op. cit.*, pp. 86, 105-19, 157-65, 219-20; Cecil Headlam, 'Imperial Reconstruction', in *Cambridge History of the British empire*, 1, pp. 634-45; G. R. Mellor, *British imperial trusteeship, 1783-1850* (n.d.), chap. 1; Parry, *Trade and dominion*, *op. cit.*, p. 17. In a sense abolition also represented a technical rationalisation of commercial law within the British empire. The breakdown of the 'line' may also be noted in Edmund Burke's indictment of Warren Hastings, to the effect that a British governor in India ought to rule 'as much as possible in the spirit of the laws of this country', quoted in C. P. Courtney, *Montesquieu and Burke* (1963), p. 183.
- 40 See Davis, *Slavery in western culture*, *op. cit.*, Part III; Anstey, *British abolition*, *op. cit.*, chap. 5, 7-9; Walvin, *Black and White*, *op. cit.*, pp. iv, ix, and xi; C. Duncan Rice, 'The Problem of Anti-Slavery Motives: Three Cases of Scottish Concern', pp. 6-10, MSS kindly sent to me by the author.
- 41 Cf. P. D. Curtin, *The image of Africa* (Madison, 1964), pp. 41-8.
- 42 See Baron F. Duckham, 'Serfdom in eighteenth-century Scotland', *History*, 54 (1969), pp. 178-97.
- 43 *Ibid.*
- 44 See E. M. Hunt, 'The North of England Agitation for the Abolition of the Slave Trade, 1780-1800', M.A. thesis, University of Manchester, 1959; James Walvin, 'How popular was abolition? Popular dissent and the Negro Question 1787-1833', unpublished paper kindly lent by the author.
- 45 See F. E. Sanderson, 'The Liverpool delegates and Sir William Dolben's bill', *THSLC* 124 (1973), pp. 57-84; and Davis, *Slavery in ... revolution*, *op. cit.*, pp. 541-51.
- 46 House of Lords Record Office, MSS, Slave trade 6.5.1806, 'Petition from Merchants, Ship Owners and Manufacturers on behalf of themselves and others in the town and port of Liverpool interested in the Slave Trade'.
- 47 HLRO, 13.5.1806, petition of 'the Town and Neighborhood of Manchester'; 7.5.1806, petition of 'London Merchants and Manufacturers Trading with Africa'; and the petitions from London and Liverpool, 2.2.1807.
- 48 The new note had been sounded just before the debate on abolition began. It was not in the demonstration of a utilitarian argument for the abolition of the commerce in human beings, but in a rejection of

utility as an argument: see *Parl. History*, 26 (1786-7), p. 520. For those who wish to correlate abolition and liberalised trade policy, we may note that this argument came first in a speech *denouncing* the Anglo-French commercial treaty of 1787.

- 49 'Whether tried on the Principles of the mercantile System, or on those of the Economists, as developed to the English Reader in the Writings of Mr. Hume and Doctor Adam Smith, this important Commerce [the Afro-West Indian trade] will be found equally beneficial . . . Yet in Place of cherishing this Source of National Prosperity, in place of extending and encouraging a Market which no Despot can shut against her, will it hereafter meet Belief, when the Mists of Fanaticism shall be dissipated, that at a Moment when all Intercourse with her was proscribed in the most opulent and commercial States of Europe, and both Force and Artifice were being employed to exclude her from the others, when Great Britain was preparing to meet the mightiest Host that ever had been arrayed against her, and was engaged in a Contest for national Existence, of which which her youngest son might not see the Termination, her Statesmen adopted Measures more fatal to her Prosperity, than all that the rancorous Hatred or insidious Guile of her arch Enemy could have accomplished or hoped, and by Laws and Regulations, withholding from the West India Colonies a necessary Supply of Labourers . . . finally accomplished the overthrow of these once flourishing Islands, and, by their Fall, ruined the Manufactures, withered the Commerce and subverted the Naval strength of the empire?': PP, 1805, x, *Papers respecting the Slave Trade*, pp. 673-4, from *Report of a Committee of the House of Assembly of Jamaica, appointed to inquire into the Proceedings of the Imperial Parliament relative to the Slave Trade*, 23.11.1804, and printed for the Commons 25.2.1805.

- 50 See Cowdroy's *Manchester Gazette*, 16.7.1814.

- 51 See Johnson U. J. Asiegbu, *Slavery and the politics of liberation, 1787-1861: a study of Liberated African emigration and British anti-slavery policy* (1969); W. Kloosterboer, *Involuntary labour since the abolition of slavery: a survey of compulsory labour throughout the world* (Leiden, 1960), chaps. 1, 3; E. W. Docker, *The Blackbirders: the recruiting of South Seas labour for Queensland, 1863-1907* (Sydney, 1970), *passim*. It must be stressed that the preceding analysis has not been designed to discount all economic interpretations of abolition. What is challenged is any interpretation which maintains that abolition flowed logically from the central tendency of British capitalism in 1800 to maximise both returns to the capitalist and the exploitation of labour power at the contemporary level of technology. Either one must analyse abolition as an extra or counter-economic process, or one must acknowledge that a major element of welfare economics was already incorporated into British society in 1800. The mere identification of such welfare elements is not enough. One must be able to trace the social and institutional linkage between abolition and other related welfare movements. We may still conclude that abolition was imposed on British capitalists, within British capitalist society.

The Liverpool Abolitionists

F. E. SANDERSON

During the course of the campaign for the abolition of the slave trade the town of Liverpool was particularly identified with the 'horrid trade'. Liverpool spearheaded the parliamentary resistance to abolition, sending at least 64 petitions to the Commons or the Lords (as compared to 14 from the London merchants and 12 from Bristol Corporation and merchants). Her representatives in parliament were the most persistent advocates of the trade; and a delegation, maintained at corporation expense, remained in London throughout the major parliamentary investigations and discussion of the slave trade which took place during the last two decades of the eighteenth century and up to 1807. Typical of contemporary attitudes was the comment of one of Matthew Gregson's London correspondents, writing in 1788, that on this question one was either a 'Humanity Man' or a 'Liverpool Man'. His inference was that outside Liverpool the popular bias was very much in favour of humanity, whereas within the town the voice of abolition could not be heard.¹

Posterity has been rather unkind to that small, cautious and beleaguered group of Liverpool humanitarians whose voice was heard, even though it was a muted voice, during the great period of abolitionist euphoria in 1787-8, and to some extent later. None of the major histories of abolition produced during the past two centuries allows them a significant place in the movement as a whole. Thomas Clarkson's *History*² accords them generous praise for their assistance to the London Committee during the opening period of the campaign; but those who, like James Bandinel,³ drew heavily on Clarkson as a source of information either ignore them completely or give them the barest mention. Klingberg's

important study⁴ gives no indication of their contribution to abolition; nor does Coupland's,⁵ except in relation to Clarkson's visit to Liverpool in 1787. Howse's examination of the Clapham Sect and abolition⁶ is equally uninformative in this respect, in spite of the close correspondence of Roscoe and Currie with Wilberforce and other members of the London Committee; so too is Ford K. Brown's analysis of the 'age of Wilberforce'.⁷

Naturally, historians of Liverpool have sometimes sought to redress the balance, though few would go as far as the modern biographer of William Roscoe in describing him as a leader of the abolitionist movement.⁸ Gomer Williams' somewhat muck-raking history of the Liverpool slave trade⁹ devoted space to the activities of the Roscoe Circle; Mackenzie-Grieve¹⁰ used the Currie and Rathbone papers and the early biographies of the Liverpool abolitionists to demonstrate their isolation in the town and the courage of their protest. Jean Trepp's article, 'The Liverpool movement for the Abolition',¹¹ is the only specialist study of its kind and was apparently written without access to manuscript sources. However, she did attempt a just appraisal of the movement, describing it as a campaign in miniature analogous to that of the country as a whole.

Unfortunately for the Liverpool apologists, any analysis which seeks to give prominence to the town's abolitionists is bound to be heavily dependent on the papers and correspondence of the main interested parties: Roscoe, Rathbone and Currie. The problem is that these were men who preferred to work under cover, not seeking the kind of publicity that would bring them to the notice of the African traders of their home town. Consequently, although they were known to the London Committee, they were not identified by the public at large as abolitionists. There is no evidence, for example, that Pitt or Fox or Lord Hawkesbury knew them as such;¹² they did not appear before the privy council or the parliamentary committees or provide written information against the trade;¹³ they did not organise petitions to Parliament on the subject (though they did on other matters); and they failed to establish a branch committee of the Society for Abolition. Of course, they considered themselves important to the movement as the guardians of the liberal conscience of Liverpool, and their friends and correspondents outside the town helped to preserve and foster their resolution. But by no stretch of the

imagination can they be accounted national figures in this context; the historical significance of their activities is that they demonstrate that Liverpool was not wholly bound by mercantile self-interest at this crucial period in her history.

THE ROSCOE CIRCLE

When the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade was formed in London in May 1787 its committee obviously expected to find reliable informants in Liverpool. John Barton, one of the original members of the Quaker Committee of Six in 1783, had been in contact with William Roscoe for a number of years,¹⁴ and it was James Phillips, another member, who first introduced Thomas Clarkson to William Rathbone early in 1787.¹⁵ From January 1787 Roscoe and his friends were exploring the possibility of setting up a local abolitionist society similar to the one in Manchester.¹⁶ Nothing came of it, but they were able to supply the London Committee with much detailed information on the African trade, and a few months later Rathbone procured the copies of the muster rolls of 52 Liverpool slavers which Clarkson was to use to great effect during his examination before the Privy Council.¹⁷ Thus, well before Clarkson began his famous tour of the country in search of evidence against the slave trade, the abolitionists in London had established contacts with their counterparts in Liverpool.

In the early stages of the campaign, at least eight Liverpudlians seem to have been involved. They are indicated on the 1788 list of subscribers to the Society for Abolition:¹⁸

Anonymous	£2 - 2 - 0
Dr. Jonathan Binns	1 - 1 - 0
Mr. Daniel Daulby	1 - 1 - 0
Mr. William Rathbone	2 - 12 - 6
Mr. William Rathbone Jr.	2 - 2 - 0
Mr. William Roscoe	1 - 1 - 0
Mr. William Wallace	2 - 2 - 0
Rev. John Yates	2 - 2 - 0

'Anonymous' was almost certainly Dr. James Currie. He was on friendly terms with the other subscribers and William Wallace was his father-in-law. To this number may be added Edward

Rushton, the blind poet and author of the *West Indian Eclogues*, whom Clarkson knew, and the Rev. William Shepherd, who was appointed pastor of Gateacre Chapel in May 1791. All these men were dissenters: Binns, Daulby and the Rathbones were Quakers; Currie was a Scots Presbyterian and the others Unitarians. All were whiggish in their politics and none (with the notable exception of the Rathbones) was engaged in a trade or business likely to bring him into direct contact with the slave trade. Together they constituted the 'Liverpool Saints': closely knit, self-regarding members of the local literary society, exercising virtually no political influence as a group but sometimes playing a vital part, as individuals, in the anti-corporation or Whig politics of the town. There was one Anglican associated with the movement. This was the Rev. Henry Dannett of St John's, who published a pamphlet under his own name in 1788 in which he attacked the scriptural justification of the slave trade. He was not connected with the Roscoe Circle, though well known to them. Another Anglican, William Smyth, son of the mayor of 1788, tutor to the Sheridan family and subsequently Regius Professor of Modern History at Cambridge, was a member of the Roscoe Circle but not an abolitionist. The sad dearth of Anglicans reflects something of the organisation of the Church at this time: the Anglican livings were in the gift of the Corporation and that body was solidly anti-abolitionist in its sympathies.

The oldest member of the group was William Rathbone III (1726-89), the son of an Anglican, a timber merchant. His father and grandfather had joined the Society of Friends in or around 1730, when the family moved from Cheshire and established themselves in Liverpool in a substantial line of business.¹⁹ The timber firm was the mainstay of the Rathbone fortunes in the mid-eighteenth century, and both father and son were inevitably involved in supplying the African ships of the town. Even after the Quaker injunction of 1763 forbidding members to supply materials for the trade, William Rathbone III, and later Rathbone and Son, continued this practice; they could hardly have remained in business otherwise.²⁰ Meanwhile, the Rathbones developed interests in the North American, West Indian and Baltic trades, a diversification which not only enriched them but allowed them eventually to escape serving the slave trade without seriously damaging the family interests. It is recorded that,

towards the end of his life, Rathbone senior was tempted to take a share in an African ship but was dissuaded by his son on religious grounds.²¹ Clarkson spoke highly of him as a man of fine understanding, of extraordinary simplicity of manners and of great humility, adding that '... he would not allow any article to be sold for the use of a slave-ship, and he always refused those who applied to him for materials for such purpose'.²² It is not certain when he made this decision to boycott the trade, but it was probably in the early 1780s.²³

His son, William Rathbone IV (1757-1809), was a man of an altogether different temperament. Quick to rouse, passionate and outspoken, he was at the heart of virtually all the major political disputes in Liverpool during the latter part of the century. A radical in politics, he supported universal suffrage and free trade and was a vigorous opponent of the war with France in 1793. His lack of restraint made him so unpopular in the early 1790s that the strain is said to have turned his hair prematurely white, earning him the soubriquet 'the hoary traitor'.²⁴ Although he continued the timber business, his main interest was in the American trades. It was his boast that his firm imported the first consignment of American cotton ever landed in Britain: 8 bales and 3 barrels in 1784.²⁵ In 1789 his brother-in-law, Robert Benson (no relation to Moses Benson the slave trader), joined the firm, serving until his retirement through ill-health in the late 1790s.²⁶ Rathbone also had an interest in the Coalbrookdale ironworks through his marriage in 1786 to Hannah Mary, the daughter of Richard Reynolds, the Quaker ironmaster of Bristol. Rathbone's home at Greenbank in Liverpool was proverbial for its hospitality. Most of the important Whigs and dissenters visiting the town found their way there; Yates and Shepherd, the Roscoes, Earles and Clarkes were all frequent visitors, as were Rathbone's sea-captains. A friend of the family permanently in residence was Theophilus Houlbrooke, a former Church of England clergyman and an associate of Joseph Priestley, who resigned his living to become tutor to the Rathbone children.²⁷ John Dalton, the great Manchester scientist, spoke of their 'stilish manner of living' for which, however, he had little taste. 'Breakfasting at nine, getting little till after three, and then eating and drinking almost incessantly to ten, without going further than to the door, does not suit my constitution', he told his brother.²⁸

By far the best known of the Liverpool reformers was William Roscoe (1753–1831). In the course of time he has been subject to a good deal of acclaim, not wholly merited, as the saviour of the town's political and cultural reputation when Liverpool was popularly regarded as no more than the lair of the English slave trade. One local historian, in tribute to his moral fearlessness and intellectual superiority, has described him as an 'internationally revered figure' who 'led, in some cases, not only Liverpool and England, but also the world'.²⁰ The comments of some of his contemporaries also approached adulation. Washington Irving said that he experienced an 'involuntarily feeling of veneration' on first meeting with Roscoe in the Liverpool Athenaeum. 'The man of letters who speaks of Liverpool speaks of it as the residence of Roscoe. The intelligent traveller who visits it inquires where Roscoe is to be seen. He is the literary landmark of the place, indicating its existence to the distant scholar. He is like Pompey's Column at Alexandria, towering alone in classic dignity.'²¹ Thomas Creevey, in 1832, found it miraculous 'that a man whose dialect was that of a barbarian and from whom in years of familiar intercourse I never heard above an average observation, whose parents were servants (whom I well remember keeping a public house), whose profession was that of an attorney, who has never been out of England and scarcely out of Liverpool . . .' should achieve such distinction as an author.²²

Roscoe was of humble background, though his family was not impoverished. His father kept a public house and owned a market garden, and Roscoe worked for him for a few years after leaving school at the age of twelve. He was not unduly sensitive about his background—which was just as well since the squib-writers of Liverpool did not let him forget it—but throughout his life he sought the kind of recognition that could only befall men of very exceptional talent or of high birth. Roscoe's ambitions were literary and scholarly; his public talents lay elsewhere. Beginning as an attorney's clerk, he was admitted attorney of the King's Bench in 1774, but left the legal profession in 1796 to concentrate on land speculation and property development and, later, banking. He was very much the self-made man, with a sharp eye for profit, a characteristic he regarded as something of a failing but in which he nevertheless indulged. In the early 1790s he was doing well in the coal trade.²³ In the late 1790s he was concerned

with Thomas Wakefield in projects for the draining of Chat Moss and Trafford Moss, near Manchester. Then he moved, very reluctantly and under the close obligations of friendship, into a banking partnership with William Clarke. His arrival heralded a revival in the Clarke fortunes, though the business was eventually to prove his undoing. In 1816 the collapse of the bank brought about his bankruptcy and the sale of his treasured library and art collection. He seems to have lost his touch in old age.³³

Roscoe's literary activities are of little relevance here except to show the quality of the man, the achievement of one who emerged from a stultifying background, with little formal education, to become a classical scholar, poet and littérateur of national merit. His first major poem, *Mount Pleasant*, written at the age of 18, shows him already an abolitionist in his sympathies. His long abolitionist poem, *The Wrongs of Africa*, and his pamphlets of 1787-8 were undoubtedly of service to the movement and were highly appreciated by the London Committee, which arranged for their publication.³⁴ His poetic inspiration came from his two favourite poets, Shenstone and Gray; and, indeed, it may be remarked that the quality of his verses is not appreciably worse than the generality of theirs. But it is surprising that Roscoe, who wrote a eulogy on Robert Burns (as did James Currie and Edward Rushton) and who admired Coleridge and Wordsworth, should have persisted with the rhetorical, prosaic, and rather stilted style of his youth. There seems to be a second-hand quality to his poetry, as if he could not translate direct feelings to paper; he had a fine technique but little to convey. His most successful poem, and the one for which he had least regard, *The Butterfly's Ball and the Grasshopper's Feast*, was approved by George III and set to music for the royal princesses by Sir George Smart.³⁵ Its simplicity of line and air of artless fantasy suggest that he might have achieved lasting fame as a children's poet had he chosen to lower his sights. His two most ambitious enterprises were his biographies of the Renaissance figure, Lorenzo de Medici, and of his son, Pope Leo X, which ran into a number of editions and brought him international notice, being translated into Italian, French and German. Horace Walpole praised the life of Lorenzo for its 'Grecian simplicity'³⁶ and Fox is reported to have appreciated the other work.³⁷ However, the *Critical Review* referred to Roscoe's mawkish style, and the *Edinburgh*

Review to his affectation of sentiment.³⁸ The works display an enormous industry and a most skilful use of source materials; their subjects serve as a screen for the true intentions of the author—to present Quattrocento Florence as a forerunner of Roscoe's bustling Liverpool (thus, as some have said, transforming Lorenzo into a Liverpool Unitarian banker). Roscoe's view of the world was always coloured by his strong attachment to his home town.

James Currie (1756–1805) was a comparative newcomer to Liverpool, one of the substantial community of Scots whose prosperity and clannishness caused some resentment amongst the older families of the town.³⁹ Like the Liverpool merchants George Dunbar, Edgar Corrie and William Ewart, he derived from Dumfriesshire. The second son of a clergyman, Currie was orphaned when young and obliged by the decline in family circumstances to seek employment abroad. At the age of 15 he emigrated to America and became apprenticed to a Virginia merchant. But the rebellion of 1775 ended his prospects. He refused to join the rebels; and although he was drafted unwillingly into the rebel army, he absconded, escaped arrest, and made a perilous crossing to the West Indies. Early in 1777 he managed to find a passage to England, returning home destitute. However, his relatives came to his rescue and supported him whilst he studied for a diploma in medicine at Edinburgh University. After qualifying in 1780 he considered an offer of employment in the West Indies but was eventually persuaded by his uncle, Dr Currie of Chester, to settle in Liverpool. There he soon gained a post as physician at the Infirmary.⁴⁰ Despite his interrupted education, Currie proved to be a fine product of the more rigorous Scots tradition. He was sharper in intellect and perhaps more able than any other member of the Roscoe Circle. He was well read in the philosophy of Berkeley, Locke, Hume and Adam Smith, well versed in the works of modern medicine, and in time was able to establish a wealthy practice in the town.⁴¹ He was the author of the first life of Burns, a project born of a single meeting with the poet for whom the Roscoe Circle shared a common admiration. Roscoe assisted him with the biography, which ran into four editions of 2,000 copies each, though it did not meet with much critical acclaim.⁴² Of greater contemporary significance were his medical writings which secured him national

recognition, in 1788 as a member of the Medical Society of London, in 1792 as a Fellow of the Royal Society.⁴³ His political views and his opposition to the corporation did not inhibit the common council from electing him a freeman of the borough in January 1802 in recognition of his services to the town.⁴⁴

It is uncertain when he became a committed abolitionist, for his brief experience in the West Indies did not immediately produce a revulsion towards the institution and practice of slavery. Perhaps he was prompted by his marriage in 1783 to the daughter of William Wallace, a Liverpool merchant who supported the cause; and Roscoe and Rathbone completed the conversion. But on this issue Currie was never as uncompromising as his two friends. Being of a more practical and cautious disposition than they, he preferred a gradualist approach to the problem and resented the tactics of the London Committee in pressing for a total and immediate abolition by means of a wholesale attack on the African traders. In character he was less approachable than the others, being stiff and unaccommodating on first acquaintance. His grave and melancholy cast of mind was compounded of his native reserve, his Presbyterian upbringing and his persistent ill-health. Shortly after his marriage he began to show the symptoms of tuberculosis and, though by strict self-discipline and self-diagnosis he was able to keep the disease at bay, he was frequently in pain and subject to long fits of depression during which he confessed he longed for death.⁴⁵ Beyond this, however, he possessed a certain timidity which could be exasperating to his friends. He preferred to work in the background, warning them against excessive zeal, and frequently pointing out the dangers in a particular course of action. He seldom took the initiative himself and when he did, as in the Jasper Wilson affair of 1793, he burnt his fingers and so reinforced his caution.

Of the others in the group, Edward Rushton (1756-1814) achieved the widest recognition through his poetry and his uninhibited attacks on the slave trade. Strictly speaking, he was not a fully fledged member of the Roscoe Circle, though he shared many of their literary interests; to some extent he was cut off from them by his poverty and blindness. According to Rushton, his conversion to abolition was the consequence of his last voyage to Africa. As a youth he had served as an apprentice with the

firm of Watt and Gregson, and at the age of 16 was appointed second mate on one of their African ships. Some years later, off the coast of Africa, he befriended a negro slave, Quamina, whom he began to teach to read. One day, as he and Quamina were plying between shore and ship transporting slaves, their craft overturned. The African secured himself to a water barrel, but when he saw Rushton in difficulties he thrust the barrel towards him. This was a conscious act of heroism; Quamina had no chance in the fierce tide and waved farewell as he disappeared from view and was drowned. Later, when the ship was on passage to Dominica, there was an outbreak of ophthalmia amongst the slaves. Since the other officers refused to enter the holds, Rushton himself treated the victims. On arrival in the West Indies he found that he had contracted the disease. He returned to Liverpool completely blind. There, 'preserved from destruction by the humanity of a negro slave', he became a fervent opponent of the trade.⁴⁶ For many years thereafter he lived in comparative isolation, in penury; trying his hand unsuccessfully as a tavern-keeper, then as editor of the *Liverpool Herald*. The newspaper brought him a certain notoriety because of its attacks on the government and the corporation, but it was a short-lived enterprise; an indiscreet article on the press-gang brought officialdom down on his head and he and the proprietor parted company.⁴⁷ He also wrote abolitionist poems, the first appearing as early as 1782, shortly after his return from the West Indies. If one excludes John Newton, who left the town thirty years earlier, Rushton was the only Liverpool abolitionist to have direct experience of the trade. It gave an edge to his writing which is lacking in the works of Roscoe and Currie. Probably his blindness saved him from active persecution, for he made no secret of his position. Clarkson sought him out when he visited Liverpool in 1787 and spent many hours in his company. But he did not persuade him to appear as an abolitionist witness in London. During the early years of the French Revolution, his outspoken views again got him into trouble with authority. By this time, however, he was able to earn something of a living as a bookseller. The last years of his life were relieved by the partial restoration of his sight after a series of operations in Manchester in 1805.⁴⁸

Concerning the others there is a paucity of information which is probably a fair reflection of their overall contribution to the

movement. The Rev. John Yates (1755-1826) was an active member of the anti-corporation group and is reputed to have been in serious trouble with his congregation for his abolitionist sermons in 1788.⁴⁹ He trained at Warrington Academy, was invited to join the Kaye Street Chapel in 1777 when he had completed his studies, and within a few months of settling in the town he pulled off the remarkable coup of marrying a wealthy heiress, the daughter of John Ashton of Woolton Hall, whose family vigorously but unsuccessfully opposed the match.⁵⁰ Yates built on her fortune to become one of the richest men in Liverpool. He was a neighbour of William Roscoe in Toxteth Park, a frequent visitor to the homes of Currie and Rathbone, and a close friend of the Rev. William Shepherd who resided with him in the early 1790s.⁵¹

William Shepherd (1768-1847) was too young to participate in the early stages of the abolitionist campaign; he was absent from the town during 1787-8, though it was clear where his sympathies lay. He came from a long-established Liverpool family, the son of a shoemaker who was a freeman by birthright and a noted supporter of Sir William Meredith and the Whig Party in the 1760s. Shepherd was educated at the Dissenting Academy at Daventry and at New College, Hackney, where Priestley was trained. In 1790 he was appointed tutor to the children of the Rev. John Yates and the following year minister to the English Presbyterian Chapel at Gateacre.⁵² A terrier in size and disposition, Shepherd proved to be one of the liveliest members of the Roscoe Circle, a witty and caustic squib-writer for the local Whigs to set against Sylvester Richmond for the Tories and the corporation. His wit disguised his strong sense of political commitment, for he was prepared to put his freedom at risk by supporting some of the victims of the political repression following the war with France. He stayed in London during the arrest and trial of Jeremiah Joyce, who was charged with treason alongside Horne Tooke and Thomas Hardy, and he visited the Rev. Gilbert Wakefield who was imprisoned at Dorchester for sedition in 1799-1800, in order, so he said, to become familiar with prison conditions before it was his turn to suffer.⁵³ Living in Toxteth, he too was a neighbour of Roscoe and a member of his literary society, contributing poetry to its meetings. William Smyth ranked him with Roscoe and Currie as part of the 'Liver-

pool Literary Triumvirate'.⁵⁴ In 1803, shortly after a visit to Paris, he published *The Life of Poggio Bracciolini*, which bears all the hallmarks of Roscoe's influence. The work was translated into French, German and Italian and earned him the honorary degree of LL.D. of Edinburgh University.⁵⁵ His abolitionist writings (if any) have not survived, but his biography of Edward Rushton brought deserved notice to one of the most courageous and neglected of the Liverpool abolitionists.

THOMAS CLARKSON'S VISIT TO LIVERPOOL

It is unfortunate that the main source of information on Clarkson's activities during 1787-8 is Clarkson himself, for members of the London Committee who authorised his tour of the country in 1787 had considerable misgivings about his fitness for the task.⁵⁶ A popular crusade was one thing; but collecting and preparing evidence to present before hard-headed ministers and M.P.s was another and a more delicate matter. With some reluctance, the Committee allowed Clarkson to recruit Alexander Falconbridge for his visit to Liverpool, but stressed the need for economy and discretion.⁵⁷ John Barton asked Roscoe and Rathbone to keep an eye on the pair when they arrived and to send a confidential report on Falconbridge. He also forwarded copies of the Committee's anti-slavery advertisements and Clarkson's abridgement of the evidence collected so far for their comments, adding of Clarkson: 'His zeal and activity are wonderful, but I am really afraid he will at times be deficient in caution and prudence, and lay himself open to imposition, as well as incur much expense, perhaps sometimes unnecessarily. I would not however have this go further than ourselves . . .'⁵⁸

Clarkson and Falconbridge arrived from Bristol by way of Chester some time early in September. They proceeded first to Rathbone's house and were then introduced to Roscoe, Currie and Rushton. Prudently, the Liverpool abolitionists did not offer them the hospitality of their homes but persuaded them to lodge at the King's Arms tavern where they might have direct and uninhibited contact with the seamen and captains who frequented the place.⁵⁹ Thereafter Roscoe and his friends seem to have kept their distance. In any case, Clarkson preferred to make his own contacts, and was soon optimistic that the town would provide

him with all the information he required. In his view, Liverpool was far more hardened to the trade than Bristol: the allegedly peculiar tools of the trade (handcuffs, shackles, and thumb screw) were openly sold in the shops; and a constant procession of seamen coming off the African ships made it easy to find informants and to note the disembarking of 'sickly and ulcerated' crews and the brutalisation of the seasoned traders.⁶⁰ But when it came to naming names he found the seamen less forthcoming; in spite of hundreds having left the trade, none would testify against it for fear of reprisals: 'they would have their houses pulled down'.⁶¹

Perhaps through lack of tact, or simply because the nature of his task made it inevitable, Clarkson gave great offence to certain respected merchants of the town. He met Edward Chaffers, a member of the Common Council, and a former slave-ship captain, who introduced him to Ambrose Lace, an African and West Indian merchant of substance. Much to Chaffers' embarrassment, Clarkson accused Lace of being implicated in the notorious massacre of Africans at Calabar in 1767. Lace made no reply but left their company and reported to his fellow-merchants that Clarkson was collecting evidence against them.⁶² Until this time the merchants had been unaware of the true intentions of the visitors. Earlier Robert Norris had met Clarkson and the elder Rathbone on the quayside and, according to him, had talked freely about the slave trade, as had others they had met; he did not suspect they were abolitionists.⁶³

Clarkson and Falconbridge now met with considerable hostility; they were harassed and forced to change lodgings; anonymous letters were received, threatening their lives. Clarkson alleged that a definite attempt was made on his life:

I was one day on the pier-head with many others looking at some little boats at the time of a heavy gale . . . I had seen all I intended to see, and was departing, when I noticed eight or nine persons making towards me. I was then only about eight or nine yards from the precipice of the pier, but going from it. I expected that they would have divided to let me through them; instead of which they closed upon me and bore me back. I was borne within a yard of the precipice, when I discovered my danger and perceiving among them the murderer of Peter Green, and two others who had insulted me at the King's Arms, it instantly struck me that they had a design to throw me over the pier-head . . . There was not a moment to lose. Vigorous on account of danger, I darted forward. One of them, against whom I pushed myself, fell down. Their ranks were broken. And I escaped, not without blows, amidst their imprecations and abuse.⁶⁴

Thus when the two agents of the London Committee left Liverpool in November they had little to show for their pains. Without a single person prepared to testify openly against the trade, they had only hearsay evidence to present before parliament. Fortunately, London and Bristol proved more forthcoming. Rathbone's and Roscoe's views on the visit have not survived, but there seems to be no reason to suppose that Currie was at variance with them when he complained to Wilberforce that it was a near-disaster. The Liverpool merchants, he said, went openly and fairly to Clarkson and were prepared to assist him in an impartial inquiry into the slave trade. Naïvely, perhaps, but honestly, they believed that there was nothing improper or illegal in its operation. Yet in effect Clarkson spurned their advances; he made no particular application to them, preferring to go about in disguise, seeking information amongst the lower class of seamen. No wonder, then, the merchants became alarmed and hostile.⁹⁶

Currie was obviously concerned that the blackguarding of Liverpool merchants would undermine the position of the abolitionists in the town. Theirs was very much minority opinion, but members of the group were on terms of friendship with many African traders; so far they had not experienced any trouble. Now Clarkson's visit had created alarm, and the abolitionists were at a serious disadvantage. Therefore Currie warned the London Committee of the dangers inherent in the present approach to the question:

To persons not in the habit of reflecting upon it, the traffic in slaves cannot be mentioned without kindling a degree of warmth that tends to repel all arguments concerning it. Their reprobation of the trade itself leads to reprobation of those engaged in it; and *their* criminality is supposed to be proportionate to the evil produced . . . Believing the African merchants and traders not only accountable for the consequences of this trade, but conscious of their guilt in conducting it, men, purposely employed in acquiring information concerning it, have shunned all intercourse with them, and drawn a great part of their intelligence from the lowest class of seamen. Nor is this all: conceiving that every enormity might be expected from the masters of vessels, who could conduct such a trade, they have listened eagerly to the accounts of their cruel usage of the seamen, and to the rumours of their dreadful barbarities of various kinds, with which the ears of the credulous have been abused. That there is no foundation for any of these reports I am, however, far from asserting . . .

When they (the Committee's agents) assert that the slave-trade is the destruction of two thousand seamen annually, and that the masters of the ships employed are, in general, men of such barbaric dispositions

as to inflict unprovoked cruelties on their crews, they bring forward positions, which, in my opinion, cannot be proved, and which, I doubt not, may be opposed by a reference to facts. It is a truth, that, in those of my acquaintance who *are* and *have been* master of Guinea-men, a great majority are men of general fair character—that some of them are men of considerable improvement of mind—and that I could point out amongst them more than one instance of uncommon integrity and kindness of heart. The same may be said of the body of the merchants concerned in the slave-trade; who are, some of them, men of liberal education and enlightened understandings; and, for spirit and enterprise in commerce, very much distinguished.

The Committee ought to enquire why seamen are attracted to this particular trade against which such barbarities are alleged and in which mortality is undoubtedly high:

A sailor is seldom a nice casuist. He takes a trip to Guinea because the wages are good; and, if he lives, rises, perhaps, first to be a mate, and afterwards a master: in this station, a few voyages more enable him to live at home, and to take shares in vessels commanded by younger adventurers. His children inherit his fortune, his commerce, and his opinions of the slave-trade; in which, perhaps, they are deeply engaged before they have ever heard that a doubt is entertained of its lawfulness.⁶⁶

This remarkable defence of the African merchants and masters by an avowed abolitionist is not at all untypical of the general approach of the Roscoe Circle. In private, Currie could be most passionate in his condemnation of the trade and incisive in his criticism of particular abuses;⁶⁷ in public, however, he showed a pragmatism which must have engendered doubts in the minds of some of the London Committee as to his reliability. It was felt that negative criticism of tactics did not help the cause; and Currie's views were very similar to the more subtle arguments put forward by the anti-abolitionists prior to the opening of the parliamentary campaign. Early in March 1788 a letter to the *Gentleman's Magazine* from 'Gustavus' damned Clarkson with faint praise, advising him to temper zeal with discretion. The African and West Indian merchants were quite prepared to see the slave trade regulated and even to consider the possibility of gradual abolition, but they were prevented from assisting Clarkson and his friends by the 'uncandid manner in which they have been treated . . . One active gentleman, when at Liverpool, is said not only to have declared the most violent prejudices against [the merchants], and to have treated their attentions with neglect, but to have employed himself in obtaining materials to incrimin-

ate them, from the most unprincipled common sailors and dock landladies.⁶⁸ Meanwhile, Roscoe was urgently pressing the Committee to adopt a gradualist approach. He advised them that a frontal assault on the slave trade was unwise in point of tactics and unjust to those merchants who had a large proportion of their capital engaged in it and who, till then, had seen nothing irregular in their commercial ventures. He sought to impress upon them the severe economic dislocation that he believed would result in Liverpool from a total and immediate abolition. John Barton in London was sympathetic to his Liverpool friends' opinions and said they would receive careful consideration; but the Committee was in fundamental disagreement with them on all counts: 'Nothing short of an entire and immediate abolition will satisfy.'⁶⁹

LIVERPOOL'S LITERARY WORKS

Though rebuffed by the London Committee in the matter of general tactics, the Liverpool abolitionists were keen to make some contribution to the cause. As their situation precluded a public campaign like that in Manchester, they found their outlet through the literary society which, from 1787 to 1789, functioned almost as if it were an unofficial branch of the Society for Abolition. Here interested members could present their poems and articles for the consideration of their friends and, by rigorous vetting, produce works of sufficient merit to be published in London or through the auspices of the London Committee itself. The published poetry included Roscoe's *The Wrongs of Africa*, Rushton's *The West Indian Eclogues* and Roscoe and Currie's *The African*, all of 1788. These writings (which are discussed in detail in the appendix) were of limited literary value and in the current poetical mould. As Sypher has observed,⁷⁰ British anti-slavery literature was so firmly set in a neo-classical form that even the most knowledgeable observers of the slave trade and of plantation slavery adopted its conventions when they lapsed into verse. The hero was almost inevitably an African of noble birth, idealised out of all semblance of reality ('a pseudo-African in pseudo-Africa'), yearning for freedom, speaking the traditional language of rebellion against oppression, and dying in circumstances of high drama.

Prose publications began when Roscoe published a pamphlet anonymously, apparently in January 1787. Barton was delighted with it and prepared to publicise it in London. 'I rejoice to find that thy Pamphlet has occasioned a ferment amongst the African Merchants of Liverpool', he wrote. 'I trust it will occasion a ferment amongst our Senators likewise & produce that conviction we so much wish to feel.'⁷¹ He was less happy with a sonnet Roscoe sent him in March. It disturbed him that the poet had diverged so far from the path of discretion that he praised philosophy before Christianity and was abusive towards their opponents.⁷² Later in the year Roscoe produced another short pamphlet, *A General View of the African Slave Trade, demonstrating its Injustice and Impolicy; with Hints towards a Bill for its Abolition*. A thousand copies were printed for distribution in London and Liverpool.⁷³ It contained nothing new apart from a statement of Roscoe's gradualist philosophy: indeed, excepting this, it was typical of the general approach to the question at that time, and typical of its author, then a practising lawyer, in that it was almost exclusively concerned with legalistic and moral issues. The correspondence of the Liverpool abolitionists in late 1787 gives ample evidence of their sensitivity towards the economic aspects of abolition, but nothing of this appeared in their publications. Yet by January 1788 the London Committee was clearly worried that its propaganda was losing impact by being tied exclusively to the humanitarian justification for abolition. As an example, the Committee cited Clarkson's successful use of statistics of the mortality of slave-ship crews in order to demolish the argument that the slave trade was a nursery for seamen.⁷⁴ The elder Rathbone, of course, was responsible for procuring the mortality figures, but his associates took no heed of the advice. They seem to have simply accepted what the African merchants told them, that a severe economic depression was the price of immediate abolition.

In contrast to versifying, pamphleteering was more direct, more overtly political, and probably reached a wider audience. But it was a difficult field for Roscoe and his friends to enter. They lived too far from the metropolis and were probably too concerned with preserving their anonymity to be of much service to the London Committee. In any case, the Committee had already some formidable talents at its disposal. It published the speeches of Wilberforce,⁷⁵ Pitt, Fox, and William Smith on the

subject; it used abstracts of the evidence before parliament to acquaint the public with its case; and in James Ramsay and Thomas Clarkson it possessed two of the most redoubtable pamphleteers in the country. It is therefore unlikely that the Committee would have commissioned works by comparatively unknown writers unless it had felt they could make a special contribution. Such a situation arose in March 1788 when the Rev. Raymond Harris published his *Scriptural researches on the licitness of the slave trade*, dedicated to the mayor, aldermen and councillors of Liverpool. As Currie put it: 'A little scoundrel, a Spanish Jesuit, has advanced to the assistance of the Slave-Merchants & has published a vindication of this traffic from the Old Testament. His work is extolled as a prodigy by these judges of composition, & is in truth no bad specimen of his talents, tho' egregiously false & sophistical, as all justifications of Slavery must be. I have prompted a little parson to answer him by telling him that if such be religion I would have none on't.'⁷⁶ The 'little parson' was the Rev. Henry Dannett. Meanwhile, Harris's pamphlet was extensively advertised in Liverpool and London and promoted by no less a person than Lord Hawkesbury, President of the Board of Trade. Liverpool anti-abolitionists were so delighted with its reception that the common council was moved to grant Harris a pension in recognition of his services to the African interest.⁷⁷ It has been suggested that Harris's defence of the trade was provoked by Roscoe's pamphlet, *A General View of the African Slave Trade*.⁷⁸ This may well have been the case, as the London Committee appeared most anxious that Roscoe himself should write a reply. By May 1788 there were already three writers in the lists, including James Ramsay; in June, Roscoe's name was added to those anxious to refute 'this Apostle of Inhumanity'.⁷⁹ In the second edition of his *Scriptural Researches* Harris retorted by laying about his detractors with considerable venom: they were illiterate and illiberal;⁸⁰ Ramsay, 'the Canonical Planter', was mean in spirit, motivated by spite, incoherent, and neither a gentleman nor a scholar;⁸¹ 'the sneering Mr. Dannett', alias 'the incautious M.A.', to whom Harris devoted most attention, is also 'the equestrian Minister of St. John's' and a great 'Ass-rider'.⁸² Harris was convinced that Roscoe's pamphlet, under cover of anonymity, was the work of a triumvirate, 'an unnatural coalition of Law and Gospel', from

which we may infer that he suspected Yates and Rathbone had a hand in it. He reminded them all that the very trade against which they inveighed was in part responsible for their several fortunes and offices.⁸³ A reviewer of the various refutations of Harris would find it difficult to understand why Roscoe's was given pride of place by the abolitionists. Like Ramsay's, it is a very slight affair. Dannett's is the most substantial, and longer than the others put together, the author being concerned to tackle his opponent on his own chosen ground, point by point, verse by verse. It is the more praiseworthy since it was published openly in his own name in circumstances when Dannett, a minister of the established church in a living in the gift of the corporation, could expect little but abuse for his pains. His object, he said, was to defend his calling and to show that the Church of England possessed a true friend to humanity in the heart of Liverpool.⁸⁴ From the amount of attention Harris devoted to Dannett it would seem that he regarded 'the mighty Rider of St. John's' as his most potent critic. However, Roscoe's pamphlet may have received more attention in London because of its timing: it appeared during the critical slave trade debates in the Lords just before the close of the session and was thought to have helped to counteract Lord Hawkesbury's influence.⁸⁵

By mid-1788 pamphleteering against the slave trade had passed its peak. Indeed, the same is true of all anti-slavery literature. The public had been saturated with poetry, drama, pamphlets, abstracts from the evidence, and extracts from the parliamentary debates appearing in virtually all the main London and provincial newspapers and journals for more than a year. Even without the widespread interest aroused by the events in France from 1789 it is doubtful whether the abolitionist movement could have maintained its momentum. A reaction was apparent before the end of 1788, not only in parliament where the African and West Indian interests were putting their case across more effectively, but also in such journals as the *Gentleman's Magazine* and the *Critical Review* which now gave preference to the anti-abolitionist point of view. Books published by two of the Liverpool delegates—John Matthews' *A Voyage to the River Sierra-Leone* and Robert Norris's *Memoirs of the Reign of Bossa Ahadee, King of Dahomey*—received long and favourable reviews.⁸⁶ Later, Archibald Dalzel's history of Dahomey, Bryan Edwards' account of

the St Domingo rebellion, and writings on Africa which were thought to confirm in certain aspects the propriety of African slavery (e.g. those by Mungo Park and James Bruce) were quoted extensively in the press and in parliamentary debates by the opponents of Wilberforce and the London Committee. The comparative dearth of anti-slave trade literature was attributed by one reviewer to the 'publick at large, as well as the senate, being tired of the tedious proceedings'.⁸⁷

ABOLITION IN DECLINE

Some measure of the numerical strength of the abolitionists in Liverpool compared to other towns is provided by the distribution of the annual reports of the Society for the Abolition. In August 1788 the London Committee sent William Rathbone 25 copies only; it sent 200 each to Bristol, Manchester, Birmingham and York, 100 to Leeds and 50 to Lancaster.⁸⁸ Earlier in the year the London Committee was active in promoting local branch committees, concentrating on Bristol and the south of England but including the north and midlands, in order to co-ordinate the gathering of information on the African trade and the treatment of seamen.⁸⁹ Committees were formed in Bristol, Manchester and elsewhere—but not in Liverpool, the town best situated for such intelligence. In fact, with the exception of Newcastle, Liverpool was soon the only large town in the country which lacked a branch committee of the Society. It was left to neighbouring Manchester as the leading representative of the north-west to take the initiative in petitioning parliament and procuring witnesses.⁹⁰

The Liverpool abolitionists were always conscious of their isolation in the town and of the need for discretion.⁹¹ Currie asked Wilberforce not to frank letters sent to him at Liverpool but to conduct his correspondence with unsigned letters conveyed by unsuspected intermediaries.⁹² He was unwilling to send an anti-slavery polemic to a London publisher, preferring to use a well-connected London acquaintance as an intermediary, admonishing him to 'keep silence'.⁹³ In writing to his uncle about the publication of his poem *The African*, he enjoins him to maintain the vow of secrecy, otherwise 'it would play the deuce with me here'.⁹⁴ Edgar Corrie, a prosperous corn merchant who wrote to Lord Hawkesbury in February 1788 making a long attack on the

conduct of the slave trade in Liverpool, asked that his name should be concealed from all except Pitt since it would cause him 'irreparable prejudice' in the town if his letter became known.⁹⁵ Hawkesbury respected his wishes and included the letter in the evidence before the Privy Council under the pseudonym 'W.I.' It is difficult to know what to make of this cloak and dagger conduct of abolition. A number of writers, echoing Clarkson's *History*, have referred to threats and reprisals against members of the Roscoe Circle; but the evidence for this is flimsy. In spite of their precautions, the identity of all the Liverpool abolitionists (if not the full extent of their activities) must have been known in the town. Rathbone (himself no model of discretion) and Roscoe were in business association with slavers; Currie, Roscoe and Shepherd were the close friends and confidants of William Smyth, whose father had strong connections with the trade and who was well informed of their attitude to abolition; Yates certainly, and doubtless also Dannett and Shepherd, attacked the slave trade from their pulpits; the Rathbones, Binns and Daulby were Quakers, and the town was well aware of the attitude of the Society of Friends to this question; and, as we have seen, the Rev. Raymond Harris could identify his detractors. Even so, there is little to suggest that any of the abolitionists experienced active persecution. Clarkson claimed that Dr Binns suffered in his practice for assisting in his enquiries and he mentions an unspecified mischievous plot laid against Binns which misfired.⁹⁶ If so, one wonders why Binns was singled out for this treatment since he was not a prominent abolitionist, and others merited the town's resentment more than he. William Rathbone's biographer alleges that the family doctor asked leave to visit him after dark for fear of injuring his practice should his carriage be seen outside Rathbone's house.⁹⁷ Yet no damaging opprobrium seems to have been attached to William Rathbone III who, until his death in 1789, was the main correspondent with the London Committee. His son was unpopular in the town for a number of reasons of which his espousal of abolition was not the most important.

The Liverpool abolitionists, interestingly, were not persecuted: indeed, one might say that the merchants of Liverpool were remarkably tolerant towards them. There is nothing surprising in Edgar Corrie's fear of 'irreparable prejudice' should his letter to Hawkesbury become known; he was, after all, attacking his

fellow-merchants before the Board of Trade and the king's chief minister. And within the Roscoe Circle James Currie's caution was proverbial; on one occasion Rathbone wrote to his friend, Samuel Greg of Styal, that though he held Currie in high regard he was an alarmist in some matters and to heed his advice would be to curtail conversation and correspondence beyond all endurance.⁹⁸ Naturally there was need for discretion. In the somewhat claustrophobic atmosphere of the town, a small coterie, meeting in each other's houses for literary and political discussions, sharing a common interest in abolition, setting themselves apart from their neighbours to some extent, could easily become the subject of ridicule, jealousy or persecution. Furthermore, they were virtually all dissenters in a town dominated by Anglicans; and some were Scots Presbyterians, which was one step lower on the scale of popularity. Generally they had nothing to fear, though loyal celebrations could provide a sharp reminder of their vulnerability when the windows of Quakers were smashed as the price of their religious scruple in not decorating their houses like the rest.⁹⁹ But this was untypical: in Liverpool the mob seldom got out of hand.¹⁰⁰

It was not so much abolition that put them at risk but the political transformation which followed upon the events in France between 1789 and 1793. Without exception, the members of the Roscoe Circle welcomed the news of the French Revolution as the herald of better times ahead for Whigs, Reformers and dissenters:

... France rises up, and confirms the decree
That tears off her chains, and bids millions be free

wrote Roscoe with buoyant optimism.¹⁰¹ They met to celebrate the fall of the Bastille and to read poems and political manifestos; they shared in the euphoria of the Whig revival which helped to produce Tarleton's great victory in the parliamentary contest of 1790; they played a leading part in the campaign to wrest control of municipal affairs from the exclusive common council (a campaign which might have succeeded but for the outbreak of war with France in 1793); they raised an agitation against the monopoly of the East India Company and organised a petition to the commons in 1792 signed by all the leading merchants of the anti-corporation group. Rathbone, of course, was in the thick of it: the merchants elected him Chairman of the Committee of

Subscribers to the Fund for Asserting the Rights of Freemen in 1791¹⁰² and auditor of the corporation accounts;¹⁰³ he sparked off fierce controversy by distributing the handbill *Equality* which he and Roscoe composed in 1792, and he engaged in a public quarrel with the mayor over the issue of parliamentary reform. Even Currie was swept along on the tide of enthusiasm and in 1790 emerged as the leader of an abortive campaign for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts.¹⁰⁴ It was the high point of their political activity in Liverpool during the late eighteenth century.

Abolition, meanwhile, though far from being a lost cause, was overshadowed by these more pressing events.¹⁰⁵ In any case, Roscoe and his associates knew that they stood no chance of incorporating abolition into the Whig programme. A large body of merchants could be recruited in the campaign for the reform of parliament, or the removal of civil disabilities on dissenters, or against the East India Company; but none would openly eschew the African trade. This was a divisive issue and the opponents of abolition knew it. As the news from France showed that moderates there were being upstaged by the extremists, so the 'men of 1789' in Liverpool found themselves under increasing pressure to define their positions more carefully. Currie was disturbed by the ease with which the African interest could represent the abolitionists as upholding the same creed as the Jacobins in Paris;¹⁰⁶ he urged that they should dissociate themselves from the 'dangerous zeal' of some of the dissenters: 'they fear no violence; and they almost court opposition; as if the object were rather to excite, than to remove prejudice. . . .'¹⁰⁷ His friends took little heed of his advice at first, but the Birmingham riots of July 1791, which destroyed the houses and property of Joseph Priestley and other prominent dissenters, threw them into alarm and caused them to discontinue their meetings on Bastille Day.¹⁰⁸ Thus, when Rathbone later decided to engage the mayor in a very public and acrimonious dispute about the form of a loyal address to the king, he found that 'all classes, even my particular friends disapproved' of his tactics.¹⁰⁹ The mob demonstrated in favour of the mayor, and the dissenters, remembering Birmingham, went in fear for their safety.¹¹⁰ Undoubtedly, the Liverpool abolitionists were deeply shocked by the barbarities of the French Revolution and shared in the popular revulsion towards all things French; but they were not deflected from their extensive correspondence in

pursuit of reform. They were bitter towards Pitt and his repression of radical and liberal movements, and they reserved their special venom for the 'renegade' Edmund Burke. But generally they kept out of print and were inactive in local politics after 1792. Shepherd expresses the prevailing mood in a sonnet he addressed to Roscoe at the height of the troubles. He advised the reformers to take shelter until the storm was past:

When wrath and discord through the nations roam,
Thrice happy who possess and prize a peaceful home.¹¹¹

Thus the members of his circle published little of a political nature in the years that followed. Roscoe, 'surrounded with cows, hogs, turkeys, geese, cocks, hens and pigeons', increasingly devoted himself to his botanical pursuits (which culminated in his membership of the Linnean Society and his founding, with others, of the Liverpool Botanical Gardens)¹¹² and settled down to write his *Life of Lorenzo* and the monumental study of Pope Leo X. Currie, equally domesticated, put aside his projected flight to America and concentrated on medical studies and his *Life of Burns*.¹¹³ Shepherd was concerned for his freedom in the late 1790s, and poor Rathbone, who believed he was under surveillance by the collector of customs and that his letters were being tampered with, was reduced to uncharacteristic caution, advising a friend in Glasgow not to write on political matters except with great care for the consequences.¹¹⁴

Their only foray into abolitionist literature in the 1790s was Roscoe's *An inquiry into the causes of the insurrection of the negroes in the island of St. Domingo* (1792) and Rushton's poem *Toussaint to his troops* which seems to have been written in 1798. The slave revolt in San Domingo was, of course, a by-product of the French Revolution and a considerable embarrassment to the abolitionists. Many explanatory pamphlets appeared, but they could not disguise the connection between the French abolitionists, Les Amis des Noirs, and the fomenting of a most bloody insurrection.¹¹⁵ Brissot, Mirabeau, Lafayette, Abbé Sièyes, Abbé Grégoire, all hated names in Britain, were members of the French society, and after the outbreak or war in 1793 the Jacobins attempted to subvert the slave populations in the British West Indies, with some success. Roscoe wrote his pamphlet before the full facts of the insurrection were known, but he was bold enough

to rise to the defence of the French abolitionists. This was a dire warning to the British planters to mend their ways:

When the native ferocity of Africa is sharpened by the keen sense of long-continued injury, who shall set bounds to revenge? . . . Resistance is always justifiable where force is the substitute of right: nor is the commission of civil crime possible in a state of slavery . . . The punishments that have been devised in the French islands, to repress crimes that could only exist by the abuse of the slave-holders, are such as nature revolts at.¹¹⁶

The outbreak of war in February 1793 was a severe blow to the Liverpool reformers. They immediately recognised that it would inflame passions at home and put an end to their hopes for the extension and improvement of the franchise and the removal of civil disabilities on dissenters. Abolition became very much a secondary issue. The bill for gradual abolition had been lost in the Lords in 1792 and the prospects for its revival were poor. The war commanded their whole attention; it was unjust and unnecessary; it played into the hands of all the reactionary forces in the country; it was ruinous to Liverpool commerce and manufacturing and produced a crisis of confidence in the stability of Liverpool banking.¹¹⁷ Roscoe, who published *Thoughts on the Causes of the present Failures* in 1793, ascribed the nation's economic ills directly to its effects.¹¹⁸

The issue of the 'poor slaves' was in abeyance in Liverpool as elsewhere. It could no longer be agitated in public except through the medium of parliament, where Wilberforce attempted to keep the subject alive with his annual motions for abolition, in spite of official indifference and some hostility, especially in the Lords. An attempt to put Dundas's gradualist motion into effect failed in 1795 and a new bill was lost in the Commons the following year. The war was going badly and the abolitionists were being pressed on all sides to wait for peace. Liverpool, whose parliamentary representatives were resolutely opposed to any interference in the slave trade, was not to experience any significant local agitation on the subject until 1804. The African merchants and the corporation continued to petition throughout the later 1790s against parliamentary bills for regulation; but abolition was not raised as an issue in either of the electoral contests of 1796 and 1802. Roscoe and his friends seem to have been completely suppressed. They had to wait until 1806, when Pitt's death and Britain's

improving prospects in the war transformed the political climate for abolition, before they felt able again to stand up and make themselves heard.

THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS OF 1806-7

It seems unlikely that the Society for Abolition could have been satisfied with the performance of the Liverpool abolitionists, even taking into account the particular difficulties of sponsoring the cause in Liverpool. For Wilberforce and the members of the Clapham Sect regarded the slave trade as an unmitigated social evil, a blight on the country's honour which put it in danger of divine retribution. The debates on gradualism in the House of Commons in the early 1790s showed that most of the committed abolitionists (the true 'Humanity Men') regarded immediate abolition as a test of personal virtue.¹¹⁹ Fox, who spoke 'out of his Soul, not his Mind',¹²⁰ was particularly scathing towards the compromisers; and Pitt stated that he trembled for the wrath to come should England fail to purge herself of the guilt and shame of the past.¹²¹ The emotion engendered by the parliamentary debates did not escape the notice of the Liverpoolians, but they failed to meet the proclaimed test of purity: in their public and private utterances they consistently favoured gradual abolition as the only way of mitigating the likely damage to the economy of the town. Hence, when the issue was revived during the Liverpool election of 1806, Roscoe went out of his way to stress his support for gradualism and full compensation for the African traders.¹²² Had Currie been alive to share in his triumph he, like Rathbone and the others, would have thoroughly approved of this stand.

The 1806 election was one of the most remarkable in Liverpool's parliamentary history. William Roscoe, almost the antithesis of the military man, was chosen by the Whigs and Reformers to stand against two soldiers, General Banastre Tarleton and General Isaac Gascoyne. For more than a decade he had been inactive in local politics. He was an abolitionist in a town still wedded to the slave trade; he was a dissenter in a community dominated by Anglicans and Tories. Moreover, he had no personal following to compare with that of Tarleton, an M.P. in the Whig interest since 1790, or Gascoyne, the corporation's successful nominee since 1796; and he was, by his own admission, a

nervous and hesitant public speaker, lacking in popular appeal. Since it was the parliament of 1806-7 that swept away the slave trade, a causal link between Roscoe's election and the abolitionist movement has been deduced. It has been suggested on the basis of very tenuous evidence that the election was fought on the issue of the slave trade;¹²³ or, alternatively, that Roscoe's nomination and success showed that the Liverpool merchants were reconciled to the inevitability of abolition.¹²⁴ But there is no doubt that the African interest was very much alive and kicking at this time. Just six months before the election the Liverpool merchants had raised one of their largest-ever petitions against abolition, containing over a thousand signatures, and headed by that of the mayor, Henry Clay;¹²⁵ and the town's delegates, led by George Case and P. W. Brancker, had been instructed to oppose all restraints on the trade, without compromise.¹²⁶ In the Commons the nagging persistence of the Liverpool M.P.s on the subject caused Lord Howick to remark of Gascoyne that 'he considered the slave trade so great a blessing, that if it were not in existence at present, he should propose to establish it'.¹²⁷ Thus it would seem poor judgment on the part of the Liverpool Whigs to have chosen Roscoe at such a juncture. '... how in the Name of Earth or Heaven a Foe to the Slave Trade & a Dissenter could be elected by the Captains, Coopers & Carpenters of L'pool, the Church & King Firebrands & all the stupid ignorant People who must have had to decide between yr. Father & his Opponents ...?' inquired William Smyth from Roscoe's son.¹²⁸

However, the slave trade had little or nothing to do with this election. Until 1806 the Whigs and anti-corporation clique in the town had supported Tarleton as their candidate, but with increasing misgivings. He had outgrown his early reputation as a rake, but not his desertion of Fox and the peace party. In 1802 there had been an unsuccessful attempt to replace him. Now it was alleged that he had become a mere placeman of the Tory government, and his neglect of his constituency was the final straw. The problem was to find a suitable candidate to put against him. The Whigs tried to persuade Lord Sefton to stand and, failing, turned successively to Sir Thomas Hesketh, Admiral Sir Isaac Coffin, and Thomas Earle, before finally arriving at Roscoe.¹²⁹ Tarleton, to avoid being left stranded without party support, went into coalition with the Corporation's Gascoyne.

That Roscoe's known views on the slave trade carried no weight is shown by the fact that he was nominated by two of the leading African merchants of the town: Thomas Leyland and Thomas Earle.¹³⁰ This was a straight fight between the Tory Corporation and its opponents, conducted along traditional lines. And abolition was hardly mentioned at all during the whole course of the campaign.¹³¹

According to Shepherd, superior organisation and the dedication of Roscoe's canvassers won the day.¹³² Others, less charitable, pointed to the prodigious bribery of the electorate. Since Tarleton and Gascoyne were successful in splitting their votes it was necessary for Roscoe to obtain plumpers to offset them. This meant he had to spend at least as much as his two opponents put together, which he was able to do with generous financial support from the African and American merchants in his camp. A biased source claimed he spent between £11,000 and £12,000 compared to £4,000 by Tarleton and £3,000 by Gascoyne.¹³³ In all probability he spent in excess of this. By the end of the contest he had received or been promised £12,270, not including sums paid out of his own substantial purse.¹³⁴ The money was well spent. On the fifth day of the poll Roscoe had a majority of the votes cast and on the seventh day Tarleton capitulated. At the end of the poll Roscoe addressed his supporters at the party headquarters in Islington. According to his son, the bulk of his speech was taken up with the question of parliamentary reform and religious liberty. But there was one significant passage on the African trade which must have made some of his supporters very uneasy. He expressed his conviction that abolition was inevitable and the town must reconcile itself to this. Economic sense required that the trade should be terminated gradually. Justice required that the merchants should be compensated for their losses since, in pursuing this trade, they had worked within the law. 'But, sir, there is another compensation of a much higher and better nature to which the merchants of this country are entitled. That compensation is to be found in the more extended trade and commerce of this country'. The overthrow of the East India Company monopoly and the establishment of free trade to the continent of America would provide the true compensation for abolition.¹³⁵ Here he seems to be playing down his earlier promise to support gradualism and full compensation; nor was his espousal of free

trade likely to endear him to those merchants with property and investments in the British West Indies.

The breach between Roscoe and Thomas Leyland, his sponsor and business associate, occurred soon after the 1806 election; their partnership was publicly dissolved on 31 December.¹³⁶ Since Leyland was not unsympathetic to Roscoe's interest in parliamentary and religious reform, one may conclude that the clarification of the new M.P.'s attitude to abolition was a determining factor. For within a short time of his arrival in London, Roscoe came under the direct influence of men like Wilberforce, the Duke of Gloucester, and William Smith, the M.P. for Norwich, who would have no truck with gradualism, and would make no concessions to the slaving interest. Houlbrooke reported that Rathbone had received one of his 'mighty Visions' and wished Roscoe to ensure that the issue of compensation was vigorously pursued. He himself was totally opposed to this course, and so were Roscoe's closest parliamentary colleagues.¹³⁷ When the abolition bill reached the Commons in February 1807, Gascoyne and the counsel for the delegates of Liverpool at first made all the running, trying to negative the bill, and, when this failed, moving to receive evidence on the matter of compensation. This was a familiar delaying tactic and they found the House totally unsympathetic. Roscoe made a brief intervention in favour of considering compensation after the bill had been passed, but Robert Thornton curtly replied that commerce was always fraught with risks and the African merchants should expect no preferential treatment. The admission of further evidence was refused; Gascoyne protested vigorously and Roscoe kept silent.¹³⁸

During the crucial second reading on 23 February, Lord Howick and Gascoyne confronted each other with irreconcilable statistics. The former estimated a total loss to the port of a mere £5,000 in dock duties; the latter argued that 40,000 tons of shipping and £2 millions of investments would be destroyed. It was at this point that Roscoe intervened to make his major speech. Without reference to the preceding discussion, he reiterated almost word for word that section of his election speech which dealt with the slave trade, linking the question of abolition with the need to expand trade generally and to break the monopoly of the East India Company. On the timing of abolition he admitted a change of heart since he had addressed his consti-

tients, being now convinced that 'six to nine months' notice was perfectly adequate. On compensation he was almost perfunctory. What he wished chiefly to stress was that Liverpool was by no means unanimous in defence of the slave trade and it was his intention to represent that 'great and respectable' body which opposed it. He concluded: 'I have long resided in the town of Liverpool; for 30 years I have never ceased to condemn this inhuman traffic; and I consider it the greatest happiness of my existence to lift up my voice on this occasion against it, with the friends of justice and humanity.'¹³⁹ It was a speech that marked both the climax of his long career as an abolitionist and, because it could not fail to antagonise the merchants, the end of his brief political career. Earlier he had received much well-meaning advice from his friends, particularly Rathbone, on how to conduct his case. He preferred his own judgement, whatever the consequences. But Shepherd was delighted: 'Your explanation of the term gradual abolition (which had certainly been misunderstood) electrified me with pleasure. I am truly happy that you have now left not the slightest ground for suspicion that by the use of that term you wished to curry favour with the Slave dealers by letting them down gently. At the same time you have done both well and wisely in abstaining from vituperative epithets. These were not needed. I trust Geo. Case & Co. will, without your kicking at them, be sufficiently mortified to find with what sentiments they are regarded by the nation at large.'¹⁴⁰ Wilberforce gave him fulsome praise at the inaugural meeting of the African Institution, where the Duke of Gloucester was in the chair. Here was a man, he said, who by strength of character had risen above the deep-seated prejudices of his townspeople and eventually won their respect. His future was secure.¹⁴¹ Roscoe thought so, too; and when there were rumours of an impending dissolution of parliament he was optimistic that his conduct during the slave trade debates would not prevent his re-election. Rathbone, however, warned him that knives were being sharpened; he would not find things easy when he returned.¹⁴²

The abolition of the slave trade was virtually the only achievement of the short-lived 'Ministry of the Talents'. Criticism of its conduct of the war and the bitter controversy surrounding the issue of Catholic emancipation not only helped to bring the ministry to its knees but produced a political climate most

unfavourable to the Whigs and dissenters. In Liverpool the reformers found that any cause espoused by them was regarded as suspect, so they found it politic to withdraw from the campaign against the East India Company.¹⁴³ It was Roscoe's further misfortune that the mayor was Thomas Molyneux, a close business associate of Thomas Leyland in the African trade (his bailiff was William Rigg, formerly of the slaving firm of Tarleton and Rigg), who did not scruple to use his influence to bring down the representative who had betrayed the African interest. Even before the dissolution was announced Molyneux had worked up a campaign against him. 'The Mayor has established himself in his true Colours, & shown all the Violence and Rancour of Party Spirit without any of the liberality of a Gentleman', observed Lord Derby;¹⁴⁴ whilst Shepherd reported that the Tories expected a new ministry would be anti-peace, anti-Irish, anti-Catholic and anti-abolition. The new election would be fought uncompromisingly on the platform of 'Church and King'.¹⁴⁵ He did not need reminding that Roscoe's last speech in parliament was in favour of Catholic emancipation.¹⁴⁶ When Roscoe returned to Liverpool, he put on a bold face, marching in procession through the constituency with a large band of freemen. At Castle Street he was waylaid by a gang of unemployed seamen armed with cudgels. In the ensuing violence no one was seriously hurt, but the whole procession was thrown into disarray and Roscoe himself was badly shaken.¹⁴⁷ It was enough. Roscoe had not been happy in parliament, feeling a novice amongst the seasoned politicians, suffering from nerves, neglecting his business at home. He was too nice a man, too domesticated, too insecure outside the close circle of his friends ever to make a successful politician. Probably he recognised this himself, for he seized upon the incident to withdraw from the contest. In a long notice to the press he announced that he and his supporters had suffered physical abuse, studied misrepresentation and prejudice, and had been denied the protection of the magistrates; therefore, to prevent further violence and likely bloodshed, he had decided not to stand for re-election.¹⁴⁸

Nevertheless, the freemen of Liverpool were not to be denied a contest. A group of freemen led by Thomas Green determined to press Roscoe's candidature in spite of his refusal; and it is a tribute to his standing with a considerable section of the town

that they were able to raise a subscription to canvass on his behalf sufficient to extend the poll to nearly seven days. Roscoe's interest polled 379 unbribed votes, including 297 plumpers.¹⁴⁰ His opponents were sufficiently alarmed to spend time and money attacking him as an enemy of the king and destroyer of the African trade. A crudely satirical pamphlet, supposedly signed by the Pope, called on 'all Apprentices, Ragamuffins, Presbyterians, Rogues, Methodists, Jail-birds, Whores, etc., to assist our Holy Cause' and vote for Roscoe.¹⁴⁰ Both Gascoyne and Tarleton promised that if elected they would restore the slave trade.¹⁴¹ Indeed, the slave trade was more an issue in 1807 than in any previous election. Tarleton actually campaigned under the banner, 'The Church and the Slave Trade for ever!', and sent two black boys through the streets with a placard announcing 'The African Trade Restored!' Green countered this by parading two former slaves with the notice, 'We thank God for our Freedom'.¹⁴² Of course, Roscoe stood very little chance of success: Tarleton came top of the poll with 1461 votes and Gascoyne second with 1277.¹⁴³

There was some talk of raising a petition against an improper election. It came to nothing, though William Smith, the abolitionist, advised Roscoe that there was a good prospect of unseating both members.¹⁴⁴ Commiseration was showered on the defeated candidate. Lord Derby offered to propose him as deputy lord lieutenant of Lancashire, but Roscoe felt that he could not in conscience take the oaths and declined.¹⁴⁵ He returned to his business and literary pursuits, and, though he remained in contact with the London Committee, his place as the leading abolitionist in Liverpool was eventually taken over by James Cropper. Once the town had been purged of the slave trade the prejudice against the abolitionists was soon dissipated. Ex-slavers co-operated with Roscoe when in 1807-11 he worked to ensure that the merchants did not circumvent the 1807 Act. In 1814 Liverpool raised its first petition against the slave trade; amongst its signatories were many former African traders headed by the mayor, Thomas Leyland. And in 1815 Roscoe was presented with the freedom of the borough in testimony 'not only of his great literary talents but of his private worth and value as a member of society'.¹⁴⁶

In conclusion, one might say that although the Liverpool

movement for abolition followed the national pattern in microcosm, given the size and importance of the African trade in the town the practical effects of their local campaign were minimal. It could hardly have been otherwise. It needs men of extraordinary intelligence, strength of character and ruthlessness of purpose to reject the way of life of their friends and neighbours in pursuit of an ideal; it needs the qualities of saints and fanatics. The men of the Roscoe Circle identified with the town, were dependent on it for their livelihood, and sought (and obtained) social recognition within it. It is inconceivable that they could have pursued the logic of their intellectual position to extremes. For abolition was just one of a number of political and social objectives; and it was not a matter of such immediacy as the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, or reform of the franchise, or the undermining of the closed corporation of Liverpool. Not so bound by mercantile self-interest as most of their social peers, more conscious of the intellectual movements of the period, they followed the fashion when abolition was a popular crusade with the upper and middle classes; and when the fashion changed and the exigencies of wartime inhibited open discussion, they remained sympathetic to the cause but were no longer active in its promotion. After 1805 they were able to resume their activities, but by this time the London Committee had no need to call upon their services. Roscoe's election as M.P. in 1806 was not a part of the abolitionist scheme, yet it is entirely appropriate that Liverpool's most vocal and consistent critic of the slave trade should have a place of honour beside Wilberforce on that historic occasion when abolition was finally achieved.

APPENDIX

The first major literary offering of the Liverpool abolitionists, and the first to be received by the Society for Abolition from any source, was Roscoe's *The Wrongs of Africa*, the first part of which was completed early in 1787 and published in the summer of that year. This was not Roscoe's first abolitionist piece: in 1777 he had published his youthful poem *Mount Pleasant* which contained much on this theme, though it was little noticed at the time. But *The Wrongs* was a more direct piece of propaganda: Currie, who kept a critical eye on the whole enterprise, wrote the preface. Originally it was Roscoe's plan to write a long three-part examination of the slave trade, dealing first with the African coast, then with the Middle Passage, and finally with the West Indian plantations. He never finished

the project; the second part, though in draft as early as February 1787, was not published until a year later, after much revision; the third part was never begun. It is not clear how well the poem sold, though its sale more than covered the cost of production, and Roscoe offered the profits to the London Committee.¹⁵⁷ It received favourable reviews and was subsequently translated into German.¹⁵⁸ Clarkson records that the Committee gave it an enthusiastic reception: 'To find friends to our cause rising up from such a quarter, where we expected scarcely any thing but opposition, was particularly encouraging.'¹⁵⁹

Part one of *The Wrongs of Africa* describes the character of the slave trade along the coast of West Africa. It depicts the Africans before the arrival of the Europeans as living a simple, idyllic existence, surrounded by the bounty of nature, and having no use for material wealth. Then comes the foul pestilence from overseas in the shape of a white trader who dangles baubles before these 'sable sons of innocence', tempting them until they are irrevocably corrupted. Innocents no longer, they commence to plunder their neighbours for human wealth:

Whilst he, the white deceiver, who had sown
The seeds of discord, saw with horrid joy
The harvest ripen to his utmost wish;
And reap'd the spoils of treachery, guilt, and blood.

The poet warns that unless this wicked avarice of Europe is suppressed, divine retribution will surely follow. Part two, which is more stereotyped in form than the first, concerns the sorrows of the Middle Passage. Its hero is Cymbello, an African prince of Zaire, whose royal father has provided him with a truly Platonic education, sending him out amongst the people to learn the responsibilities of kingship and the real meaning of freedom. Grown to manhood and in love with a beautiful maid 'as chaste as the cool beams of evening', Cymbello seems likely to fulfil all that is expected of him. But one night, under a rapturous moon, he and his mistress are surprised by a group of black banditti. Seized in 'sacriligious rape', he is taken to the coast where his freedom is exchanged for a few trinkets. On board the slave-ship Cymbello is afflicted by bitter despair; as the ship leaves the coast his grief momentarily blinds him to his princely duties. But then, roused by a vision, he understands that his destiny is to vindicate the wrongs of Africa, and thereupon he leads the slaves to rebellion. The ensuing battle is short, fierce, and inevitable in its outcome. On deck, Cymbello is recognised by his beloved who interposes herself between him and certain death; as she dies in his arms he, too, is cut down and killed. The poem ends with a long panegyric in praise of liberty and recalls the noble example of Greece and Rome, long since polluted by man's coarseness and greed. The muse warns that mankind is destroying its birthright, but promises new hope as the abolitionists rise up to break the chains of slavery and blunt the knives of cruelty. Apparently Roscoe, who numbered some of the African merchants amongst his friends and business associates, was remarkably ignorant of the true situation of the slave trade and of conditions obtaining on the west coast of Africa. How could he be so romantically naïve? But Roscoe was consciously putting aside reality to write in accordance with the well-established conventions of his day which required an extreme simplification of the slaver-slave relationship.

Rathbone seldom put pen to paper for publication; nor did his son.

But Edward Rushton frequently wrote on slavery themes. His best-known work, *The West Indian Eclogues*, dedicated to Bishop Porteus of Chester, appeared in 1787 and brought him to the notice of Clarkson and the London Committee.¹⁰⁰ Its form is characteristic of the period, describing slavery through the eyes of Africans who speak the language of cultivated humanitarianism. His poetry is more direct and vigorous than Roscoe's and contains fewer poetic devices:

Oh! for the pow'r to make these Tyrants bleed!
These, who in regions far remov'd from this,
 Think, like ourselves, that liberty is bliss,
 Yet in wing'd houses cross the dang'rous waves,
 Led by bale avarice to make others slaves:—
These, who extol the freedom they enjoy,
 Yet would to others every good deny:—
These, who have torn us from our native shore
 Which (dreadful thought!) we must behold no more.¹⁰¹

In the first eclogue two slaves converse. Adoma relates how he was cruelly punished by an overseer for attempting to defend his mistress, Yaro, from a beating. Jumba, his friend, counsels revenge. In the second, Adoma is tormented by the fear of retribution if he is caught plotting against his master. He is reminded of the slave who was gibbeted alive for attempting rebellion and took six days of fearful agony in dying. In the third, two new characters appear who inform us that Jumba was betrayed by Adoma and narrowly escaped the clutches of his master only to be killed later in an ambush. In the fourth part, Loanga's wife, Quamva, is violated by their master. During a thunderstorm he plots revenge. Othello-like, he imagines that his wife has succumbed to the seductive powers of the white man:

... Come dark revenge, and death,
 And steel my soul to stop a wanton's breath.

Rushton knew conditions in the West Indies at first hand and his description of the topography and conditions on the plantations is convincing. Yet he does not draw on his experience for his main themes. The description of the gibbeting of a slave seems to be derived from an account of an execution at St Eustacia in 1759 which received wide publicity in abolitionist circles in the 1780s.¹⁰² His account of the violation of Quamva and Loanga's revenge was apparently inspired by another poem, *The Wrongs of Alooma*, which was published anonymously in Liverpool in 1788 and to which Rushton referred in a footnote to his fourth eclogue, describing it as a true story of an incident in 1655 when a slave took advantage of the British attack on Jamaica to kill his unfaithful wife and her Spanish master. *The Wrongs of Alooma* dresses up the action in heroic style: the African, being of noble birth, does not strike furtively but meets his oppressor fairly on the field of battle. The Spaniard, too, is not without nobility of soul; for as he dies he begs Alooma's forgiveness. His repentance of his past misdeeds wrings tears from the slave who vanquished him.¹⁰³

In the midst of this outpouring of the Liverpool abolitionist muse, James Currie, another occasional poet, at first preferred a supporting role, merely advising his friends. But in March 1788 a poem composed jointly by Currie and Roscoe appeared anonymously in the London papers. This

was *The African*, originally entitled *The Negroe's Complaint*, which told the story of Maraton, another African possessed of all the breeding of an English nobleman and all the virtues of an English gentleman. Maraton is torn from his homeland and his mistress, Adila, to become a slave. Thrown into the dank hold of a slave-ship, he emerges from despair after being granted a vision of Adila beckoning him the way to freedom. He resolves to die:

Tomorrow the white man in vain
Shall proudly account me his slave;
My shackles I plunge in the main,
And rush to the realms of the brave.¹⁶⁵

The poem consists of twelve stanzas of four lines each, a form intended to make it suitable as a music-hall song. In fact, it was set to music in Liverpool prior to publication. Currie entertained justifiable doubts as to its merits and sent it to an influential friend, Admiral Sir Graham Moore, for his advice. Moore made some slight alterations, changed its title and placed it in what he considered the most fashionable London paper, *The World*. He acceded to Currie's urgent request that its authorship should remain secret from the editor.¹⁶⁶ It is uncertain whether the poem (or song) caught on in London, but it was subsequently reprinted in the *Carlton-House Magazine* in 1793 and in *Mrs. Riddle's Metrical Miscellany* in 1802.¹⁶⁶ This was Currie's only known venture into print on the subject.

NOTES

The research on which this paper is based was undertaken in 1971-4; and I am indebted to the Principal and Council of Edgehill College of Education for granting me study-leave in session 1971-2, to the School of History, University of Liverpool, for affording me facilities as an external research student, and to Dr P. E. H. Hair for supervising my research.

- 1 Liverpool Public Libraries Record Office (LPL), Samuel correspondence, 920 GRE 2/17, David Samwell to M. Gregson, 11.10.1788. See F. E. Sanderson, 'Liverpool and the Slave Trade: a guide to sources', *THSLG*, 124, pp. 154-76, for a full account of source material on Liverpool. Since this publication the LRO has acquired a valuable set of papers relating to one of the town's most prominent slavers: Letter book of Thomas Leyland, 1786-8, 387 MD 59, amounting to 780 pages and 2,262 letters.
- 2 Thomas Clarkson, *History of . . . the abolition of the slave trade*, 2 vols. (1808) (subsequently Clarkson).
- 3 James Bandinel, *Some account of the trade in slaves from Africa* (1842).
- 4 F. J. Klingberg, *The anti-slavery movement in England* (New Haven, 1926).
- 5 R. Coupland, *The British anti-slavery movement* (1935).
- 6 E. M. Howse, *Saints in politics* (Toronto, 1952).
- 7 Ford K. Brown, *Fathers of the Victorians* (1961).
- 8 G. Chandler, *William Roscoe of Liverpool* (1953).
- 9 Gomer Williams, *History of the Liverpool privateers, with an account*

- of the *Liverpool slave trade* (Liverpool, 1897) (subsequently Gomer Williams).
- 10 A. Mackenzie-Grieve, *The last years of the English slave trade* (1941).
 - 11 *Journal of Negro History*, 13 (1928), pp. 265-85.
 - 12 Roscoe of course made his position clear when elected to Parliament in 1806.
 - 13 Edgar Corrie, the corn merchant, wrote to Lord Hawkesbury in favour of abolition in 1788: BM Add. MSS. 38416, ff. 35-7; and his letter was presented as part of the evidence before the privy council. He was not a member of the Roscoe Circle and seems to have been acting entirely on his own account.
 - 14 Their first letter in the Roscoe Papers is dated 1786, but they are likely to have been in contact much earlier. Barton married Maria Done who had once claimed Roscoe's affections and to whom he addressed his early love poems: she died in 1784.
 - 15 BM Add. MSS. 21254, 'Proceedings of the Committee for the Abolition', vol. I, 22.5.1787; Clarkson, I, p. 247.
 - 16 LPL, Roscoe Papers, 920 ROS 239, John Barton to Roscoe, 21.1.1787. Roscoe visited Barton in London the following month.
 - 17 BM Add. MSS. 21254, 7.6.1787. Rathbone was paid £2-12-0 for the charges he incurred in this task.
 - 18 Gomer Williams, p. 570; E. A. Rathbone (ed.), *Records of the Rathbone family* (Edinburgh, 1800), p. 94. E. A. Rathbone describes this as a branch committee of the society, but she is mistaken.
 - 19 E. Rathbone, *William Rathbone* (1905), p. 28; E. A. Rathbone, *op. cit.*, pp. 6-7.
 - 20 His dealings in the slave trade were not entirely voluntary: see *ibid.*, p. 253.
 - 21 *Ibid.*, p. 12.
 - 22 Clarkson, I, p. 413.
 - 23 The last reference I have found to Rathbone and Son supplying timber to the African trade is in 1783, for the third voyage of the bark *Preston*, owned by Thomas and William Earle: Keele University Library, Davies-Davenport MSS. As the Earles had close personal and political ties with the Rathbones, presumably it would have been difficult to refuse them.
 - 24 E. Rathbone, *op. cit.*, p. 27.
 - 25 *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11; Thomas Fletcher, *Autobiographical Memoirs* (1893: written in 1843 and printed for private circulation), p. 25.
 - 26 E. A. Rathbone, *op. cit.*, pp. 88-9. See also *Billinge's Liverpool Advertiser*, 16.11.1795 and 4.1.1796.
 - 27 E. A. Rathbone, *op. cit.*, pp. 108, 111-15.
 - 28 *Ibid.* The letter from Dalton, Manchester, 16.1.1797, is quoted in full, pp. 111-15.
 - 29 Chandler, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-2.
 - 30 Washington Irving, *Sketch-Book* (1st ed., London, 1820), quoted in E. A. Rathbone, *op. cit.*, p. 124.
 - 31 *Creevey Papers*, 2, p. 256, in *ibid.*, p. 125.
 - 32 LPL, 920 ROS 1446, W. Enfield to Roscoe, 14.5.1791.
 - 33 See Henry Roscoe, *The Life of William Roscoe*, 2 vols. (1833), *passim*. There is a haziness about Roscoe's financial affairs which his son's biography does nothing to dispel. This is partly because the biography is based on the subject's voluminous correspondence, which

- inevitably leads to the depreciation of Roscoe the Liverpudlian in favour of Roscoe the cosmopolitan man. It is inexcusable, however, and does not enhance the father's memory, that Henry Roscoe should have ignored the important business and social relationship with Thomas Leyland, who broke with Roscoe in 1806 and should have minimised the close association with those, like Thomas and William Earle, who were prominent African traders.
- 34 See, for example, the letters of John Barton in LPL, 920 ROS 205-67 and BM Add. MSS. 21254-5, 'Proceedings of the Committee for Abolition', Minute Books 1 and 2.
 - 35 Chandler, *op. cit.*, p. 114. A new edition of the poem was published in 1794.
 - 36 R. D. Thornton, *James Currie and Robert Burns* (1963), p. 171.
 - 37 LPL 920 ROS 1578-82, correspondence on *The Life of Leo X*.
 - 38 Henry Roscoe, *op. cit.*, 1, pp. 332-4.
 - 39 W. Shepherd's satire, *The True and Wonderful History of Dick Liver* (3rd ed., Liverpool, 1824), p. 10, speaks of the 'parsimonious presbyterians' keeping to themselves and extending their concerns by sending to Scotland for poor relations. See also S. G. Checkland, *The Gladstones* (1971), pp. 30-1.
 - 40 W. W. Currie, *Memoirs of the Life of James Currie* (1831), 1, pp. 2 ff.
 - 41 Thornton, *op. cit.*, p. 136, estimates he was earning about £2,000 p.a. towards the end of his career.
 - 42 Currie, *op. cit.*, 1, p. 307.
 - 43 LPL, Currie Papers, 920 CUR 112; *Williamson's Liverpool Advertiser*, 31.12.1792.
 - 44 LPL, Minutes of the Common Council, 6.1.1802.
 - 45 Currie, *op. cit.*, 1, pp. 75-6; Thornton, *op. cit.*, pp. 132-3 and 153.
 - 46 W. Shepherd, *The Life of Edward Rushton* (Liverpool, 1824), pp. xii-xiv.
 - 47 *Ibid.*, p. xx. Apparently no copies of the paper have survived.
 - 48 *Ibid.*, pp. xv-xxiv. He was eventually able to read without spectacles.
 - 49 H. D. Roberts, *Hope Street Church, Liverpool* (Liverpool, 1909), p. 217.
 - 50 *Ibid.*, p. 216.
 - 51 Anon, *A Selection from the early letters of the late Rev. William Shepherd* (Liverpool, 1855), pp. 39-40.
 - 52 *Ibid.*, pp. 24 ff.
 - 53 *Ibid.*, pp. 52 ff. and 77-80.
 - 54 LPL, 920 ROS 4559, William Smyth to Roscoe, 6.12.1796.
 - 55 *Letters of Shepherd, op. cit.*, pp. 86-90.
 - 56 BM Add. MSS. 21254, 'Proceedings of the Committee', vol. 1, 12.6.1787.
 - 57 *Ibid.*, 7.8.1787. See also LPL, 920 ROS 245, Barton to Roscoe, 16.6.1787.
 - 58 LPL, 920 ROS 247, Barton to Roscoe, 15.8.1787.
 - 59 Clarkson, 1, pp. 370-2 and 385-8.
 - 60 *Ibid.*, 1, pp. 375-7 and 394-6.
 - 61 *Ibid.*, 1, p. 359.
 - 62 *Ibid.*, 1, pp. 383-4. Three years later Lace was called before the Select Committee of the Commons to explain his conduct, in the course of which he substantiated Clarkson's account of their meeting:

- Parliamentary Papers, Accounts & Papers*, 1790, XXIX, 698, pp. 633-6.
- 63 *PP, A & P*, 1790, XXX, 699, pp. 51 ff. Norris claimed he did not at this stage believe the visitors were abolitionists because Clarkson asked him to find employment for Falconbridge as master of a slave-ship. Both Clarkson and Falconbridge vehemently denied this accusation.
- 64 Clarkson, 1, pp. 409-10. This alleged murder attempt has been retold *ad nauseam*. A recent publication (Jack Gratus, *The Great White Lie*, London, 1973, p. 28) even embellishes the account by describing the sailors as 'evil-looking men' who gave Clarkson 'bad blows'. On the face of it, it seems unlikely that such an attempt would be made in broad daylight in front of witnesses unless the men were drunk, which Clarkson does not infer. Possibly it was meant to scare him. His final comment—'I escaped, not without blows, amidst their imprecations and abuse'—would seem to support this. Clarkson was without the stalwart support of Falconbridge on this occasion; a determined bid to kill him by eight or nine men in these circumstances could hardly have failed.
- 65 Currie, *op. cit.*, 1, p. 122.
- 66 Currie to Wilberforce, 31.12.1787, quoted in *ibid.*, 1, pp. 113-16. Currie mentioned one specific case, of Clarkson's allegations against 'Capt. H. of the King Joe' (this seems to be the 'King Jos' [*sic*], master Josiah Hort, owned by Hort and Miles Barber), which the Committee had asked him to authenticate. The charges, he said, were completely unfounded.
- 67 See, for example, LPL, 920 CUR 108, 111 and 113.
- 68 *Gentlemen's Magazine*, 58 (1788), pp. 214-15.
- 69 LPL, 920 ROS 253, Barton to Roscoe, 6.3.1788. Roscoe was not without support from influential quarters: Bishop Porteus was also a gradualist.
- 70 W. Sypher, *Guinea's Captive Kings* (1942) (subsequently Sypher), pp. 4-5 and *passim*.
- 71 LPL, 920 ROS 241, Barton to Roscoe, 7.2.1787. No copies seem to have survived.
- 72 LPL, 920 ROS 243, Barton to Roscoe, 17.3.1787. Roscoe seems to have suppressed the poem at Barton's request. Both poem and pamphlet apparently escaped the notice of his son, for they are not mentioned in his biography.
- 73 Henry Roscoe, *op. cit.*, 1, p. 83 and note. Again, it was published anonymously.
- 74 *Gentleman's Magazine*, 58 (1788), pp. 161-2, citing the Report of the Committee for the Abolition, 15.1.1788, which does not appear in the extant Committee records.
- 75 Wilberforce never wrote anything on the slave trade for publication; he approved of petitions to parliament but distrusted what he called 'systematic agitation': R. I. and S. Wilberforce, *The life of William Wilberforce* (1838), 1, p. 184.
- 76 LPL, 920 CUR 108, Currie to Sir Graham Moore, 13.3.1788.
- 77 LPL, Minutes of the Common Council, 4.6.1788.
- 78 Ian Sellers, 'William Roscoe, the Roscoe circle and radical politics in Liverpool', *THSLC*, 120, p. 49.
- 79 LPL, 920 ROS 254-6; Henry Roscoe, *op. cit.*, 1, pp. 87-8. The Com-

- mittee adjudged Roscoe's contribution to be the work of a master and the best answer Harris received. A second edition was printed early in July 1788.
- 80 Rev. R. Harris, *Scriptural researches on the licitness of the slave trade* (2nd ed., Liverpool, 1788), p. ix.
- 81 *Ibid.*, p. 123.
- 82 *Ibid.*, pp. 141 ff.
- 83 *Ibid.*, p. 211. Roscoe's work, *A scriptural refutation of a pamphlet lately published by the Rev. Raymund Harris* (London, 1788), does not give the impression of being written by more than one hand, though Harris is so emphatic that he may have had good grounds for this assertion. Certainly he knew Roscoe was concerned in it, though he respects his anonymity.
- 84 Henry Dannett, *A particular examination of Mr. Harris's scriptural researches on the licitness of the slave trade* (London, 1788), p. ix.
- 85 LPL, 920 ROS 256; Henry Roscoe, *op. cit.*, 1, p. 88.
- 86 The reviewer in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, 58 (1788), p. 435, described Matthews as 'a sensible, humane, and well-informed writer'. In the same volume, on p. 725, there is a review of an anti-abolitionist pamphlet from Liverpool which begins: 'Let it not be thought, because this address comes from *Liverpool*, it speaks the sentiments of persons interested in the violation of humanity, as it is now the fashion to call the slave trade.'
- 87 *Ibid.*, 60 (1790), p. 638.
- 88 BM Add. MSS. 21255, 'Proceedings of the Committee', 26.8.1788.
- 89 Clarkson, 2, pp. 4-5.
- 90 E. M. Hunt, 'The north of England agitation for the abolition of the slave trade', unpublished M.A. thesis, Manchester University, 1959, *passim*.
- 91 For an early examination of this concern, see LPL, 920 ROS 241, 7.2.1787.
- 92 *Life of Wilberforce, op. cit.*, 1, p. 355.
- 93 LPL, 920 CUR 106-9, March to April 1788.
- 94 LPL, 920 CUR 110, Currie to Rev. George Duncan, 5.7.1788.
- 95 BM Add. MSS. 38416, ff. 35-44; 38310, f. 14b. In particular Currie wanted his name to be concealed from Wilberforce.
- 96 Clarkson, 1, pp. 389-90. Mackenzie-Grieve, *op. cit.*, p. 253, apparently quoting from the Binns Papers (LPL), states that Binns was called at night to the house of Robert Benson which lay beyond Salthouse Dock, a place notorious for footpads and drunken sailors, but that being suspicious he made inquiries and found the message to be false. This seems to be the 'mischievous plot' to which Clarkson refers.
- 97 E. Rathbone, *op. cit.*, p. 27.
- 98 Liverpool University Library (LUL), Rathbone Papers, II.i.46, Rathbone to Greg, July 1799 (?).
- 99 The local press charitably blamed 'small boys' for this gratuitous violence, e.g. *Williamson's Liverpool Advertiser*, 30.3.1789.
- 100 Except, of course, at election times, when free beer was available.
- 101 From *Unfold Father Time*, which he wrote in 1790. At the outbreak of the Revolution, Roscoe produced an *Ode to the People of France*, which was published in Liverpool. He sent a complimentary copy to Fox: H. Roscoe, *op. cit.*, 1, p. 106.

- 102 *Williamson's Liverpool Advertiser*, 14.2.1791.
- 103 *Ibid.*, 22.10.1792. He was never allowed access to the accounts.
- 104 *Gore's General Advertiser*, 14.1.1790.
- 105 Currie and Roscoe continued to supply information to the London Committee. For example, in 1790 Clarkson wrote asking them to help refute the evidence of Captain Hall and Ambrose Lace before the Commons: *Life of Wilberforce*, *op. cit.*, 1, p. 262.
- 106 Currie to Dr W. C. Wells, n.d. but presumably late 1789 or early 1790, quoted in Currie, *op. cit.*, 1, p. 110.
- 107 Currie to Dr Percival of Manchester, 7.2.1790, in *ibid.*, 2, pp. 57-8.
- 108 H. Roscoe, *op. cit.*, 1, p. 108.
- 109 LUL, Rathbone Papers, II.i.162, Rathbone to Houlbrooke, 23.12.1792. Rathbone, who described the town as 'perfect lunacy', was defended by Roscoe at a public meeting on this issue. Currie was disapprovingly silent throughout.
- 110 H. Roscoe, *op. cit.*, 1, pp. 123-4.
- 111 *Ibid.*, 1, p. 127.
- 112 *Ibid.*, 1, pp. 246, 257 and 265.
- 113 Currie, *op. cit.*, 1, pp. 213-18, 246 ff. Roscoe helped him in his research on Burns.
- 114 Rathbone to Dugald Bannatyne, 26.3.1799, in E. Rathbone, *op. cit.*, pp. 19-20.
- 115 C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins* (2nd ed., New York, 1963), p. 73, claims that Clarkson had a hand in the initial revolt of the mulattoes by bringing the St Domingo deputy, Ogé, to London and giving him letters of credit to buy arms: no reference is given.
- 116 H. Roscoe, *op. cit.*, 1, p. 91.
- 117 F. E. Hyde, B. B. Parkinson and S. Marriner, 'The port of Liverpool and the crisis of 1793', *Economica*, 18 (1951), argue that the crisis was not, in the first instance, a result of the war but a product of the bad harvests of the preceding year and a reduction in circulation when the country banks stopped payments. However, Roscoe and Currie believed it was caused by war and thought it more serious than it eventually proved.
- 118 H. Roscoe, *op. cit.*, 1, p. 125. Lord Lansdowne referred to it approvingly in a speech in the Lords. But of all the Roscoe Circle, Currie was the most distressed by the war and complained bitterly to Wilberforce of 'the lamentable star-chamber oppression, produced by the folly and fanatical bigotry of the times': R. I. and S. Wilberforce, *The correspondence of William Wilberforce*, 1 (1840), pp. 95-9. His open letter to Pitt in 1793 under the pseudonym of Jasper Wilson had a wide circulation and ran to several editions in a few months. When Currie's identity became known he was subject to much abuse, some of it orchestrated by George Chalmers of the Board of Trade, and Currie contemplated quitting the country to escape persecution. Wilberforce wrote kindly, advising him to lie low and wait the resolution of the war. He added that the cause of the slaves must suffer too, but, 'If I mistake not, there is one who does not forget them, but is likely to assert their Cause & punish their oppressors': LPL, 920 CUR 54.
- 119 Cobbett's *Parliamentary History*, 29, pp. 1055 ff. See also D. B. Davis, 'The emergence of immediatism in British and American anti-slavery thought', *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 49 (1962), pp. 209-30.

- 120 LPL, 920 CUR 47, William Smyth to Currie, 16.4.1807.
- 121 *Parliamentary History*, 29, debate of 2 April 1792. *Ch. 2000* c. 100 became less forthright after 1793.
- 122 Rathbone supported him in this, Houlbrooke did not. See LPL, 920 ROS 2154, Houlbrooke to Roscoe, 14.2.1807.
- 123 G. W. Matthews, 'Some notes on the Liverpool edition of 1807', *THSLC*, 79, p. 77. Sypher, p. 181, describes Roscoe as a 'true abolitionist who eventually suffered for his beliefs in 1807'.
- 124 Sellers, *op. cit.*, p. 58.
- 125 House of Lords Record Office, petition of May 1807.
- 126 LPL, Minutes of the Common Council, 1.4.1807. There was and the other delegates, John Weston and Thomas Hodge, were given a special vote of thanks by the council.
- 127 *Hansard*, 6, p. 946. During the debate of 28 February 1807, when time Roscoe had replaced Tarleton as *Liverpool's* *first* *member*.
- 128 LPL, 920, ROS 4584, Smyth to William Roscoe, 16.4.1807.
- 129 LPL, *Poll Book and Addresses*, Wright and Cruickshank, 1807, p. 105. Thomas Hodgson offered to stand, but withdrew when Roscoe was nominated: *ibid.*, p. 105.
- 130 LPL, *Poll Book and Addresses*, Jones and Wright, 1807, p. 105.
- 131 This is a well-documented election. Four volumes of *poll books* and addresses have survived, representing all parties, in addition to Roscoe's copious correspondence on the subject, the Rathbone Papers and the local press.
- 132 LPL, 920 ROS 4381, Shepherd to Roscoe, n.d.
- 133 LPL, *Poll Book and Addresses*, Wright and Cruickshank, 1807, p. 105.
- 134 LPL, 920 ROS 3873-3878. His accounts are not entirely clear but they name the leading contributors and sums received or promised. It was suggested in 1807 that several thousands of the promised money did not materialise: 920 ROS 3883; but the 1806 accounts show that £1129 outstanding.
- 135 H. Roscoe, *op. cit.*, 1, pp. 349-74.
- 136 Gomer Williams, p. 620n. There is no mention of the breach in the surviving Roscoe and Leyland Papers, or in Henry Roscoe's biography.
- 137 LPL, 920 ROS 2154, Houlbrooke to Roscoe, 14.2.1807.
- 138 *Hansard*, 6, pp. 717 ff., debate of 10 February; pp. 942 ff. debate of 20 February. This of course assumes a fair degree of accuracy in the *Hansard* account.
- 139 *Ibid.*, pp. 961-2. A fuller account in the *Liverpool Chronicle* of 4 March agrees with the 'corrected version' in H. Roscoe, *op. cit.*, 1, pp. 366-75.
- 140 LPL, 920 ROS 4382, Shepherd to Roscoe, n.d.
- 141 LUL, Rathbone Papers, II i. 157, Roscoe to Rathbone, 13.4.1807. In his diary Wilberforce described Roscoe as 'mild, quiet, unassuming and sensible': *Life of Wilberforce*, *op. cit.*, 3, p. 289.
- 142 LPL, 920 ROS 3058, Rathbone to Roscoe, 28.2.1807; LUL, Rathbone Papers, II i. 157.
- 143 LPL, 920 ROS 3059, Rathbone to Roscoe, 30.3.1807 and post. 22.4.1807.
- 144 LPL, 920 ROS 1189, Lord Derby to Roscoe, 23.3.1807.
- 145 LPL, 920 ROS 4386, Shepherd to Roscoe, 3.4.1807 and post. 14.4.1807.
- 146 H. Roscoe, *op. cit.*, 1, pp. 384-5.

- 147 *Ibid.*, 1, p. 392.
- 148 *Liverpool Chronicle*, 6.5.1807. Roscoe gave a similar explanation to the Duke of Gloucester who had offered to support him in the event of a contest: LPL, 920 ROS 1750. Gascoyne also made accusations of intimidation and misrepresentation against Tarleton, no doubt with equal justification.
- 149 H. Roscoe, *op. cit.*, 1, p. 403; LPL, 920 ROS 1750, Roscoe to Duke of Gloucester, 16.5.1807 (draft); *Poll Book and Addresses*, Wright and Cruickshank, 1807, p. viii. By comparison with 1806 this is a poorly documented election.
- 150 LPL, 920 ROS 3883 and 3886.
- 151 LPL, Mayer Papers, vol. 2, p. 24.
- 152 LPL, 920 ROS 1190, Lord Derby to Roscoe, 20.8.1807.
- 153 *Gore's Poll Book* for 1807. It is interesting to note that most of the gentlemen and merchants who voted for Roscoe in 1806 did not switch allegiance, but abstained. Thus the total poll of 2014 is remarkably high in the circumstances.
- 154 LPL, 920 ROS 4540, Smith to Roscoe, 10.6.1807. Smith absolved Roscoe from the charge of irresolution and over-prudence, though he must have felt that the Liverpool Reformers had given in easily.
- 155 LPL, 920 ROS 1190, Lord Derby to Roscoe, 20.8.1807.
- 156 LPL, Minutes of the Common Council, 6.4.1815.
- 157 BM Add. MSS. 21254, 'Proceedings of the Committee', 7.6.1787.
- 158 LPL, 920 ROS 241, 248 and 254; H. Roscoe, *op. cit.*, 1, pp. 78-83.
- 159 Clarkson, 1, pp. 279-80. John Barton told Roscoe that he alone knew of the authorship, but other members of the London Committee evidently knew that it originated in Liverpool.
- 160 Clarkson, 1, p. 372.
- 161 E. Rushton, *The West Indian Eclogues* (London, 1787), Eclogue I.
- 162 The difference in the original story is that the slave took three days to die, not six.
- 163 Sypher, p. 191. The poem was at one time wrongly attributed to Roscoe, but it seems to be from the pen of Hugh Mulligan, an Irishman who settled in Liverpool and died about 1798-9. There is a tribute to him from Rushton in William Shepherd (ed.), *Poems and other writings by the late Edward Rushton* (1824), pp. 30-2. Shepherd omits the fourth eclogue from his collection of Rushton's poems, perhaps because the theme was too indelicate for public taste.
- 164 Chandler, *op. cit.*, p. 273. Mackenzie-Grieve, *op. cit.*, p. 193, says it was Dr Binns, not Currie, who collaborated with Roscoe on the poem.
- 165 LPL, 920 CUR 106-8.
- 166 Sypher, p. 181.

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